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On the Cover: A Scanner Darkly, The Ant Bully and Monster House hit theaters in July. Comic-Con Cover: The new animated series, Legion of Super Heroes, premieres on Kids' WB! this fall. Anime Expo Cover: Highlander ® is a worldwide copyright and trademark of Davis-Panzer Productions, Inc. and Gétéve. Licensed by and © 2006 Davis Merchandising Corp. All Rights Reserved. METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER <sup>™</sup> & © 2006 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios Inc. All Rights Reserved.







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ANIMATION MAGAZINE

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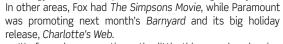
hen you attend the annual Licensing Show in New York City every year, it's hard not to feel odd about how companies offer up their animated characters as slick agents of mass consumerism. 'Let our toons sell junk to your kids,' they seem to shout. Put our colorful characters on your sugarcoated breakfast treats and let our sexed-up vixens make your kids grow up before their time.

That's why the big question on the minds of Looney Tunes fans was what Tweety Bird creator Bob Clampett would have thought

about the latest incarnation of his beloved canary on heiress Nicky Hilton's fashion line? At least the folks at Disney had the good sense to sign up Hollywood firecracker Brittany Murphy as the voice of previously mute Tinker Bell. The spunky actress is a great choice to play Peter Pan's fairy pal, and she's getting her own movie in an upcoming animated DVD release. Murphy's confetti-filled appearance on the first day of the Licensing Show did add some much-needed star power to the event. It's great casting, given the fact that Murphy has been portrayed in gossip columns as a somewhat "colorful" character on the social circuit. We wouldn't want Wendy's mischievous nemesis to be played by a sweet innocent Dakota Fanning type!

As usual, the studios were all hyping their next big tent-poles. Sony was all smiles about next year's Surf's Up and Spider-Man 3, while Warner Bros. was showing off Harry Potter's new look in the

2007 installment: Yes, the boy wizard is growing up fast and has a cool new haircut in The Order of the Phoenix. The studio also had flashy displays for its new show, Legion of Super Heroes, and this fall's animated penguin movie, Happy Feet (now, please don't confuse that with Sony's Surfs Up!). Flushed Away, Shrek the Third, Kung Fu Panda and Bee Movie were all part of the DreamWorks' package. Scholastic and New Line are hoping for the Lord of the Rings/Narnia crowd to line up to see The Golden Compass. That's the first feature in the proposed trilogy based on Phillip Pullman's best-selling fantasy books.



It's funny how sometimes the little things end up leaving the bigger impression. My favorite part of the whole trip was getting my picture snapped with my role model, SpongeBob SquarePants at the Nickelodeon booth. I also got a big kick out of the new Jim Henson Designs venture, launched by The Jim Henson Company and 4Kids Entertainment. The show marked the first official introduction of the new line of design-oriented merchandise inspired by the late artist's pre-Muppet sketches. We'd take those little monster lunch boxes and graphic T-shirts

over Nicky Hilton fashion accessories any time. As Henson

put it so wisely and succinctly years ago,



### Ouote of the Month

Henson

Designs

"Simple is good!"

"Animation is going through a transition, it's trying to go in unconventional directions. Triplets of Belleville showed that there is quality animation outside of America with a sensibility different from mainstream America."



—Sony Pictures Classic co-president Michael Barker in reference to his company's acquisition of Marjane Satrapi's animated feature, Persepolis.

ANIMATION MAGAZINE

### ANIMATION MAGAZINE

August 2006

Vol. 20, Issue 8, No. 163 Info@animationmagazine.net

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List Rental Quantum List Marketing 480-860-6036 ANIMATION MAGAZINE (USPS 015-877/ISSN 1041-617X)

Published monthly by **Animation Magazine** 30941 West Agoura Road, Suite 102 Westlake Village, CA 91361

Periodicals postage paid at Thousand Oaks Post Office, CA, and additional mailing offices

> POSTMASTER SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO ANIMATION MAGAZINE 30941 West Agoura Road, Suite 102 Westlake Village, CA 91361

### TO SUBSCRIBE:

For the U.S., the rate is \$50 for 12 issues or \$85 for 24 issues. Rates for Canada and Mexico are US\$65 for 12 issues or US\$110 for 24 issues delivered by foreign airmail. Foreign rates are US\$80 for 12 issues or US\$136 for 24 issues delivered by foreign airmail. Please allow six to eight weeks for initial delivery.

Also available in a digital version for \$36 for 12 issues or \$60 for 24 issues.

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### The Animation Planner

# August

Broken Saints

Check out the new Broken Saints: The Complete Series on DVD today. Also

on shelves this week: Baby Felix and Friends: Vol. 2: Magic Bag Mania and Beavis & Butt-Head: The Mike Judge Collection, Vol. 3. The Italian town of Conversano hosts the Imaginaria Film Festival through the 7th (www.imaginariafilmfestival.org). In Boston, SIGGRAPH continues through the 3rd (www.siggraph.org/s2006).



Paramount finally releases Steve Oedekerk's hot new CGanimated *moo*ovie *Barnyard* in theaters today.



We finally get the chance to get a full season's worth of episodes on the new *Xiaolin* Showdown: Complete First Season DVD today. Another hot title to look for is The Ultimate Avengers 2. If you're in the mood for globetrotting, you can visit the Soviet Union for the KROK International Animated Film Festival in various cities in the country thru the 18th (www.krokfestival.com).



The beautiful city of Portland, Oregon, is the backdrop for the Portland **Indy Animation** Festival (www.pdxanimation.com) thru the 13th.

5 With the new animated DVD releases The Brak Show: Vol. 2; Sealab 2021, Season 4; Hong Kong Phooey: Complete Series; Magilla Gorilla: Complete Series and The Simpsons: Complete Eighth Season out in stores today, how are we supposed to save any money for our retirement?



15-Sept.1 Discover various animated treats at the Action/Cut Short Film Competition in Los Angeles, Calif. (www.actioncut.com).



Four very powerful words: Snakes on a Plane. That's right, Samuel Jackson saves us from some crazy reptiles in this muchanticipated summer movie. We also hear that Michel Gondry's new movie The Science of Sheep has some interesting animation sequences in it.



**22** Among the numerous new DVD offerings today, we recommend Alvin and the Chipmunks: Trick or Treason and Tom and Jerry: Shiver Me Whiskers.



**27-27** The **London International Animation** Festival draws all kinds of toon attractions to the city (www.liaf.org.uk).



five-day Hiroshima Animation Festival (www.urban. ne.jp/home/hiroanim).

Nicktoons hosts its annual **Animation** Festival both online and on-the-air (www. nicktoonsnetwork.com).



23-27 Time to put on your Captain Kirk costume once again and attend the **World Science Fiction Convention** in Anaheim, Calif. (www.laconiv.org).



29 It must be some sort of weird DVD Convergence Week because we feel the need to get our hands on the hot, hot. hot copies of The Tick: 10th Anniversary Edition; Darkwing Duck, Vol. 1; Talespin, Vol. 1; South Park: Complete Eighth Season and Brother Bear 2.



To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail sgurman@animationmagazine.net

ANIMATION MAGAZINE 6 August 2006 www.animationmagazine.net





# BOOKS WE LOVE: THE SUMMER READING EDITION

by Sarah Gurman and Ramin Zahed

We know the summer season has arrived when we are suddenly struck by the sheer number of glorious new books focusing on comic-book and animation-related matters. Titles from Seattle's Fantagraphics Books are always on top of our wish list when it comes to spending our hard-earned dollars, and they certainly have numerous titles to choose from



this summer.

SUPERMAN

First up is another beautiful volume in the company's repackaging of George Herriman's landmark *Krazy and Ignatz* Sunday strips. This latest edition, designed by Chris Ware and edited by Bill Blackbeard ,is subtitled "Shifting Sands Dusts Its Cheeks In Powdered Beauty" and features full-page strips and some extra "oddities" from 1937 and 1938. There's something so intrinsically beautiful, timeless and simple about Herriman's strip that makes you cherish every single frame and line drawing in this volume. We're sure a hundred years from now fans will still get hooked on the twisted relationship between the poor lovesick cat who

admires the heartless mouse who hurls bricks at him.



a fine time to get retro and dive into DC Comics' beautifully reproduced *Superman Archives* series. To date, seven volumes of the classic Golden Age comics by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster have been printed in hardcover. Not only do you get top-notch quality art and involving storylines, the volumes also come packed with original ads, prose stories and original covers.

If you like a more contemporary look at the Man of Steel, then you'll have to pick up *The Art of Superman Returns* by Daniel Wallace. As usual, the folks at Chronicle Books have done

a great job of collecting all the cool concept and development art of a live-action or animated feature, in this case, Singer's



visually stunning epic. Fans can enjoy close to 200 art pieces featuring everything about Clark Kent and his alter-ego (from sketches depicting The Fortress of Solitude and Metropolis to costume designs) in this heroic effort to get inside the heads of Singer and his design team.

You might consider exerting some of your own creative superpowers with Hayden Scott-Baron's Manga Clip Art. Brimming with fun illustrations, the guide from Andrews McMeel Publishing introduces the building blocks behind the Japanese-rooted art form that has steadily gained momentum over the past 50 years with



of manga like Ghost in the Shell, Naruto and Akira. Manga Clip Art features a basic road map to Adobe's Photo-

the success

shop and explains essential concepts for character design like simple structure, color theory, shadows and highlights. Actually, the accompanying CD holds the real creative bounty with a 30-day trial version of Photoshop Elements, and line art for accessories, backgrounds and characters that you can mix, match and manipulate. Flipping through the pages of characters that cross-over all genres (That's the beauty of manga!) from romance to futuristic thriller to indie rock drama, you can't help but feel inspired to spend some time deciding whether your winged beast should have two or three sets of arms and figuring out how well he will fare with your guitar-toting girl punk.

You can also become the master of your PC or Mac audio universe with a little help from Chris Middleton's *Creating Digital Music and Sound*.

Another clutch resource from the fine folks at Focal Press, this tome walks you through the

nuts and bolts of recording, mixing and remixing. Middleton provides a rundown on digital creation basics such as hardware, workstations, loops, beat matching, microphone us-



age, multi-track recording and mastering. (No worries, definitions for loads of sound recording terms appear in the book.) From there he moves into focused applications, including more recently developed sound platforms like podcasts, Internet radio and Flash, which have not been given much audio attention in previous guides of this kind.

If all else fails to motivate you out of the depths of a summertime creative coma, spending some time with Uncle Walt will surely help. After all, legend has it that his inspired words fueled the *Snow White* production team to work tirelessly and gladly through the night and weekends on the first Disney animated

feature. Kathy Merlock Jackson has compiled over 20 insightful interviews and articles about Mickey's dad, spanning his entire career in *Walt Disney Conversations*. Published by University Press of Mississippi, the paperback includes fascinating pieces like Disney's testimony before the House Un-American



Activities Committee and the 1962 Newsweek profile "The Wide World of Walt Disney," offering a poignant snapshot of the world he built and how that interacted with the America he was living in. In an interview with iconic producer Cecil B. DeMille, Walt muses, "In planning a new picture, we don't think of grown-ups and we don't think of children, but just of that fine, clean, unspoiled spot down deep in every one of us that maybe the world has made us forget and that maybe our pictures can help recall." Kind of makes you wish more of today's animation titans would take us back to those clean, unspoiled spots instead of the same old, tired tourist traps!



ans of wise-cracking sailor **Popeye** had a major reason to go on a major spinach-chomping from the last spinach-chomping fro a major spinach-chomping frenzy last month. Their prayers were answered when Warner Home Video announced plans to release previously unavailable classic Popeye shorts on DVD in 2007. WHV has cleared the rights to release 231 animated shorts released theatrically by Paramount between 1933 and 1957, as well as 220 made-for-TV toons, 65 episodes of The Continuing Adventures of Popeye produced from 1978 to 1981 and 26 Popeye & Son shorts produced in 1987.

The theatrical library consists of 120 black-andwhite shorts and 111 Technicolor ones produced by Fleischer Studio and Famous Studios. The good folks at WHV have already started major preservation and restoration work on the titles. Popeye has been one of the only major theatrical franchises in film history that had never received a legit home video release. The pugnacious seaman has been charming fans ever since cartoonist Elzie Segar introduced him in his Thimble Theatre strip in 1929. It's good to know that this important animated figure will finally get the classy DVD treatment it deserves and "takes to the finish!" Toot! Toot!

# Kids' WB! Spins Web for Spider Riders new set of animated arachnids

A new set of animates and have landed safely on Kids' WB! Spider Riders, the new toon from Coliseum (Cookie Jar's newly minted action-adventure brand) has joined the Kids' WB! Saturday morning lineup (at 10:30). A co-production with Japanese ad agency Yomiko and toon shop Bee Train (.hack//SIGN), the show has been a hit with viewers on Japan's TV Tokyo and Canada's Teletoon already. Based on a book by Emmy-winners Tedd Anasti and Patsy Cameron-Anasti, the animeinspired series is produced by Emmy winner Steve Hodgins (Rolie Polie

Olie, Ned's Newt) and directed by Koichi Mashimo. The series is aimed at six- to 12-year-old boys and follows the adventures of a young boy called Hunter Steele who has to train to become an ArachnaMaster



Cuppa Coffee's popular series Bruno & the

> Banana Bunch

warrior and defend his land against the evil Invectids. Fans can also follow the show's characters and play the game online at www.spiderriders.com. One slight warning: Play it for too long and you may develop a taste for flies.  $\blacksquare$ 

# Storm Hawks to Soar on Cartoon Network

udging by the stunning trailer Vancouver-based toon house Nerd Corps was showing at last year's MIPCOM, their new Storm Hawks series is going to be one of the hottest new offerings of 2007. Cartoon Network (U.S., U.K., France and Latin America) plans to air the show next fall, and MGM and Spin Master have signed on as North American merchandising agent and worldwide toy partner respectively. Nerd Corps topper and series creator Asaph Fipke tells us that he's thrilled



about his show's hot streak. "You can call the animation 'Neo 3D,' as it is CG with traditional western animation influences ... it's all about sky knights battling it out, but it also has lots of comedic elements and very strong writing." Nerd Corps' president Ken Faier adds, "The series' character-driven stories and incredible action sequences lend themselves extremely well to platforms such as video games or toys, giving kids the

ability to extend the Storm Hawks fantasy off-screen." Bring it on, you magnificent nerds. ■

# Cuppa Coffee Runneth Over

W hat's up with our friend, Adam Shaheen and his hotter-than-hot studio Cuppa Coffee? It sounds like the Toronto shop is busier than ever. Shaheen tells us that his studio is working with E! Entertainment to produce a stop-frame animated show about celebrities created by Eric Fogel of Celebrity Deathmatch fame and directed by Fogel and Andrew Horne. The studio is also producing a new series for MTV and LOGO, based

on Alan Brocka's acclaimed Rick & Steve indie shorts. (Yes, that's the one featuring two gay lovers made out of Lego parts.) MTV2 is currently airing a new season of Celebrity Deathmatch, produced by the prolific house. "It all cements Cuppa as the primo stop-motion house in the world," says a proud Shaheen as he looks over his animated empire.

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8 August 2006



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# Marvel Forms *Ultimate Alliance*, **Puts Cards on the Table**

by Ryan Ball



arvel Comics' answer to DC's Justice League is making its way to the gamespace with Activision's Marvel: Ultimate Alliance. Set to street this fall, the game will feature more than 140 characters from the Marvel universe, including 20 playable superheroes with unlocakble wardrobe changes. In addition to superstars such as Spider-Man, Wolverine, Captain America, Blade, Thor and Silver Surfer, some more obscure caped crusaders are waiting in the wings to surprise hardcore comic-book aficionados.

"There are tons and tons of nods to the fans," says Dan Vondrak, project lead for developer Raven Software. "We picked some really hardcore fan favorites for villains or for the unlockable hero outfits—there are some bizarre choices. The mass market will probably be saying 'who the heck is this?' or 'this is one of Thor's outfits?' (hint hint). Plus, many of the conversations refer to some past Marvel events that only comic fans will know."

Vondrak tells us his team made sure to stay true to each character's history when designing their signature moves. "Captain America's shield has become one of the most popular attacks at Raven, especially in competitive coop mode—it cleans up," he reveals. "Ghost Rider and Thing have been a lot of fun, too. A flaming skull and a massive bruiser? Kind of easy to make those fun."

The game features a storyline written by Raven Software's Bob Love and Marvel's CB Cebulski, and cinematics animated by Blur Studio, which recently received an Oscar nomination for its CG short film, Gopher Broke. "Blur loves the Marvel universe, so they made all sorts of great suggestions and even created new FMVs for us," Vondrak says. "Once you see them, you are going to be upset it's not a full-length feature film."

According to Vondrak, the coolest thing about Marvel: Ultimate Alliance is the novel abundance of characters from the Marvel universe. He comments, "There has not been another game where you can experience this many Marvel heroes. You can slam Thor's hammer into the ground or send it flying through the air and it will return to your hand. Ghost Rider can throw people around with his chains. There's just so much to do. This game is huge."

Marvel: Ultimate Alliance will be available for PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Nintendo Wii, PlayStation 2, Xbox, Sony PSP, Nintendo Game Boy Advance and Windows PC in time to make your holiday wish list. Until then, you can get your Marvel hero fix by picking up a copy of the recently released direct-to-video animated feature Ultimate Avengers.

# **Marvel Trading Card Game**



Jason Ray

Five questions for Konami Digital Entertainment producer **Jason Ray** 

Q: What is the key to making a trading card game work on video game platforms?

A: The most important and difficult part of converting a card game to a video game platform is displaying every necessary detail on screen. With a complex system like Marvel Trading Card Game, we have text prompts, a turn log, a dynamic chain, etc. in addition to the cards and special effects that help players see all the interactions on the field.

Q: How is this one different from others on the market?

A: We noticed that many of the card video games

didn't have a good single-player story, a useful tutorial (if one even existed), and the opponents felt repetitive. With unlimited access to the vast Marvel Universe of heroes and villains, we had a great time creating a story, built an intriguing and informative tutorial and designed a large number of uniquely challenging decks based on exciting characters.

### Q: Was Marvel heavily involved in making the game?

A: Definitely! We've hired a Marvel writer as well as popular Marvel artists to create an authentic comic book experience. We've been working closely with both Marvel and Upper Deck to

ensure a truly authentic and entertaining MTCG experience.

Q: What can you tell us about Konami's tournament support?

A: We'll announce

more details as we get closer to release, but we allow for user created tournaments in addition to those sponsored by Konami. Expect a robust online experience, and Konami will be hosting plenty of tournaments and giving out valuable prizes ranging from T-shirts to game consoles.

### Q: What element of the game do you think players will respond to the most?

A: Players will be blown away by the sheer size of the game. Single-player alone has over a hundred different decks, tons of cut scenes drawn by various Marvel artists and multiple storyline branches for added replay. On top of that, we

> have online, head-to-head competitions, ranking and tournaments. We're working to make our first game in the series great and memorable right from the beginning.

Marvel Trading Card Game will be available this fall for Nintendo DS, PSP and PC platforms.



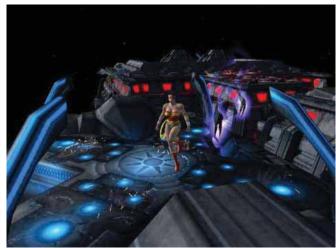
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# Game On for DC's Justice League

by Ryan Ball



arner Bros. Animation's beloved *Justice League* TV series brought the popular DC comics to the screen and built a legion of devoted fans, an audience Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment hopes to expand with the debut of the *Justice League Heroes* video game. Slated for release by Eidos Interactive this fall, the superhero title will al-

low gamers to live out their high-flying fantasies by stepping into the tights of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, The Flash, Green Lantern, Martian Manhunter, Zatanna and other classic DC characters.

To craft the game's storyline and dialogue, Warner turned to *Justice League* series scribe Dwayne McDuffie, who has also written comic books and earned an Emmy nomination for his work on War-

ner's animated series Static Shock.

"As always, the toughest thing to come up with in a *Justice League* story is a threat worthy of their power," McDuffie tells us. "Fortunately, the serial nature of the game suggested coming up with a story that showcases lots of villains, which raised the question, 'what would make all of these guys work together?'

We came up with a pretty cool answer, I think."

McDuffie is careful not to spill too many beans in regard to the game's twists and turns, but says he's very fond of the structure. "You can't win by simply playing one character all the way through, you have to use the skills and powers of the whole group," he notes. "Justice League is a team concept and Justice League Heroes is true to that."

McDuffie has been writing animated pilots titled *Go Boy 7* for Disney and *Triple Threat* for Nickelodeon, and is also working with Scott Kolins on a Marvel Comics miniseries titled *Beyond*.

Justice League Heroes was developed by Snowblind Studios with cut scenes animated by Plastic Wax. Snowblind animator Randall Ng says the team worked hard to achieve fluidity, grace and power in the animations, but mostly just wanted to do right by DC's fanbase.

"Having my own stack of comics and having attended many Comic-Cons, I know how important these characters are in the hearts of fans," Ng says. "I ask myself, 'Are these heroes acting and fighting like they do in the comics? Do they feel heroic? Are they the way you would imagine them to be? Is this fun to play?"

These questions and more will all be answered when *Justice League Heroes* arrives for PlayStation 2, Xbox, PSP and Nintendo DS. Also coming this fall is *Justice League Heroes: The Flash* for Game Boy Advance. ■

# Konami Puts Dark Horse's *Hellboy* in Play

by Ryan Ball

o bring a little fire and brimstone to the superhero video game genre, Konami Digital Entertainment and developer Krome Studios have teamed with Dark Horse Comics, *Hellboy* creator Mike Mignola and filmmaker Guillermo del Toro to create an interactive experience that will hopefully be hell on the competition. Konami producer Paul Armatta tells us the goal was to draw inspiration from both the comics and del Toro's feature film from Sony Pictures.

"Basically, we're going back to the

comics for storylines, settings, and characters, and we're using the film for visual style and reference," Armatta comments. "We've been lucky enough to sit down with



Mignola and del Toro on several occasions, and, in one of our first conversations, they suggested looking at the *Conqueror Worm* series as a place to start. That's what we did, and it turned out to be a really great suggestion."

According to Armatta, the team at Krome will take advantage of next-gen advances in texturing, shading and lighting features while expanding the *Hellboy* universe by creating new characters with creative direction and feedback coming di-

rectly from Mignola and del Toro. "They bring ideas and suggestions to the project that can only come from people who are as intimately familiar with it as they are."

The Hellboy game is in the early stages of development and is scheduled to debut in 2007 for PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and PSP.





# **Poetic Scansion**

Richard Linklater's latest opus offers a glimpse of the future through toon-shaded glasses. by Ryan Ball

cclaimed director Richard Linklater revolutionized the coming-of-age movie with Slacker and Dazed and Confused, rethought the romantic comedy with Before Sunrise (and its sequel, Before Sunset), then proceeded to give a new face to animation with the 2001 release, Waking Life, and this summer's A Scanner Darkly. To bring revered science-fiction author Philip K. Dick's trippy novel to the screen, Linklater employed the same interpolated rotoscoping process he used on the 2001 release, Waking Life, an inexpensive but deceptively involved software-based application that turns grainy live-action video into vibrant animation

the vector-based animation software Rotoshop.

Based on Dick's own experiences with drug abuse, A Scanner Darkly takes place seven years in the future and is set in suburban Orange County, Calif. Here, we meet Bob Arctor (played by Keanu

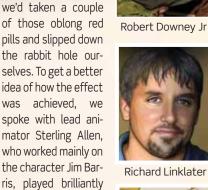
Reeves) a strung-out junkie with a split personality disorder brought on by Substance D, a destructive new designer drug that is sweeping the nation. Half of the time, Bob thinks he's Fred, an undercover narcotics officer assigned to infiltrate a suburban residence that is home to a group of paranoid addicts (played by Robert Downey Jr., Woody Harrelson, Winona Ryder and Rory Cochrane).

The film's unique visual style effectively immerses viewers into a world that is both familiar and unsettlingly askew, making us feel as if pills and slipped down the rabbit hole ourselves. To get a better idea of how the effect was achieved, we spoke with lead animator Sterling Allen, who worked mainly on the character Jim Barris, played brilliantly by Downey.

Allen had no previous animation experience before joining the Scanner team. Having earned a studio art degree from the University of Tex-

as in Austin in 2003,

he was working at various photo labs and helping to run an art gallery in Austin when he heard that local boy Linklater was holding auditions for animators. His art portfolio got him a try out, which led to a job and eventually a promotion. But first, he had to learn his way around Rotoshop, the aforementioned vector-based



Richard Linklater



Sterling Allen

that literally bristles with life.

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animation software Bob Sabiston developed for *Waking Life*.

"I think the software is really intuitive for somebody who knows how to draw, but not necessarily someone who's used to key-frame animation or 3D animation," Allen notes. "I guess the hardest part was learning how to use the Wacom pen. It's sort of the industry standard for animation, but probably 65 to 70 percent of the team had never even used one."

Using the Wacom tablets, Allen and his fellow animators drew on top of the digital video footage Linklater shot with his actors on real locations. However, not every frame had to be painted over because, like Flash, Rotoshop has a "tweening" function. "That basically means you can draw a line on frame one and skip forward to frame ten and draw another one, and the computer will make up the lines in between," Allen explains, noting that it will also interpolate line thickness, opacity and color. Once the lines were drawn, the colors were added as individual layers.

Backgrounds and certain props were traced over and made into frozen layers, which are similar to symbols in Flash, so that they could be drawn just once and placed in the scene. Automobiles were also created as layers and animated along a timeline, which accounts for the way they surreally bob up and down as they move down the road.

If A Scanner Darkly were to be made strictly in live action, one element that would have been difficult to pull off on an \$8 million budget is the "scramble suit" worn by the narcotics agents to conceal their identities from one another. The suit projects onto the wearer an ever-changing hodgepodge of diverse facial and bodily features, making him a virtual everyman, as the script states.

"Each of those shots required three animators," says Allen. "They would use [Reeves'] body and motions as a skeleton but draw different features to hide him. Animator A would draw the whole scene, changing characters every 30 frames. So you've got like a Hispanic male for 30 frames and all of a sudden it switches and you have an older black gentleman, then it switches again to a white secretary-looking lady. Animators B and C do the exact same thing, all with different characters." He explains that the three different threads were then layered on top of each other with opacity fluctuations creating the blending effect.

According to Allen, around 50,000 different characters were created for the Scramble Suit scenes. A 250-frame shot would take approximately two weeks and required three times the manpower of a shot involving a regular character.

To those who say this brand of rotoscoping isn't really animation and that the software is doing all the work, Allen replies, "Yeah, we're not drawing with a pencil or painting a cel, but, as far as I'm concerned, it's pretty damn close. We're actually drawing this stuff, and there's no frame of the film that wasn't looked at by an animator."

It's clear from watching the film that not everything was traced from the live-action footage. There are hallucinatory sequences involving Kafkaesque transformations, insect infestations and an alien being, all of which had to be drawn and animated from scratch.

Allen says what makes *Scanner's* visual style different from *Waking Life* is that it is more life-like and more focused on line work and character consistency. "There were people who worked on *Waking Life* but were really loose animators, and they didn't work out for *Scanner*," he remarks, noting that of the 50 core animators who worked on the new film, only about eight came from the *Waking* crew.

"it's real easy to make this stuff look bad," Allen adds. "If you'd seen our first two months of work, you would have been appalled. We were on such a tight schedule that every shot we finished had to go straight into the film, whether it was training footage or not. It wasn't until the movie was officially supposed to be over in October that we were able to get that extra time and go back as a skeleton crew of about ten of us and re-work some of that original footage."

The entire production process took about 16 months and apparently took its toll on Linklater, who may have had his fill of animation frustration. "He made two films in the time it took to just animate *Scanner*." Allen points out. "I think he just moves through ideas too quickly, and this is like making a movie twice."

Hopefully enough moviegoers will see A Scanner Darkly at least twice and create a demand for more animation from Linklater, a filmmaker who always seems to step in with a breath of fresh air just when things start getting stale and homogenized.

A Warner Independent release, A Scanner Darkly opens in select U.S. cities on July 7 before rolling out wider on July 14 and July 28.

Toon Makeover: Rotoscoping transforms
Rory Cochrane's live-action performance as
paranoid addict Charles Freck into vibrant
animation. The animators used Wacom
tablets to draw on top of the digital footage
director Richard Linklater shot, adding colors in
individual layers once the lines were drawn.















# **Craftsman House**

Gil Kenan and his team at Sony Pictures Imageworks put their hybrid Monster House on the competitive summer market. by Barbara Robertson

ou can file this one under the first CGanimated family comedy horror feature, ever. "We barely squeaked out a PG-13 rating," says Gil Kenan who directed Sony Pictures' Monster House, an animated film about three kids who discover that their neighbor's scary house is alive. "It's intense. Like an amusement park ride, you know it will be fine at the end, but it doesn't pull any punches."

Kenan's trip to the director's chair was something of an amusement park ride itself. The UCLA film school grad won his MFA and UCLA's Spotlight Award in 2002 with a live-action / stop-animation short film called The Lark. A CAA agent's assistant spotted the 10-minute short at the Director's Guild screening, and within a year, Kenan was directing co-producers Robert Zemeckis and Steven Spielberg's unique summer offering, Monster House.

"Every time I tell this back, it sounds unlikely," Kenan laughs. "But, the rule book for this way of making animated films hasn't been written. So, I knew more, in a way, than anyone around me or at least I could give that impression."

"This way" of making animated films blends performance capture of live-action actors with keyframe animation for the human characters

and includes pure keyframe character animation for others—all of which was handled by Sony Pictures Imageworks. For performance capture, the studio used an evolution of its ImageMotion system originally developed for The Polar Express. The Monster House system captured actors' voices, bodies and facial expressions simultaneously and Kenan could direct as many as six actors on set at one time performing for several minutes. "One of the joys of working this way was that we got the full chemistry of the actors working with each other," says the helmer.

Two hundred infrared cameras and six video cameras surrounded the 20-by-20-by-16-foottall stage on which the actors performed. The actors wore motion-capture suits with between 60 and 80 reflective dots and had a similar number of dots applied to their faces.

Here's where the filmmaking/animation process becomes unique: Kenan created the film's basic structure by working with an editor who cut the video reference footage into a movie. Using that footage, Imageworks "integrators" applied the performance data from the actors' body dots to the digital characters they were playing. Although adults played adults in this film, and children played children, the stylized

characters look caricatured humans, so the data didn't precisely match. The characters, modeled with subdivision surfaces in Autodesk's Maya from scans of clay maquettes, had larger heads, eyes and hands than humans.

"Motion capture is a tool, not a genre," says Troy Saliba, co-animation director with T. Dan Hofstedt. "We had between 30 and 40 integrators interpreting the performancecapture data. They weren't mindlessly running calculations. They were making creative choices."

Once Imageworks provided Kenan with digital characters in a virtual set, he



Jay Redd

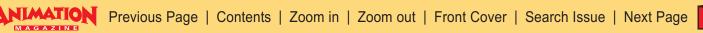


Troy Saliba



T. Dan Hofstedt

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spent the next four months shooting the film. "To offset the CG-ness that would be inherent in the process, I brought in a DP [director of photography] who hadn't done anything with computers or even effects," he says. With help from Imageworks camera operators, the DP created traditional camera moves in a virtual setting: While the digital characters performed on a 50-inch plasma screen, the camera operators moved real cameras and the digital camera followed. "We covered every scene in the film with multiple angles," says Kenan.

This footage, edited into a "shot" version of the film, gave a team of around 60 animators their camera moves—the layout, in effect. Hofstedt estimates that the body data provided animators with 75 to 90 percent of the performance used in the film. "Changes to the body data were usually directorial changes to make the character fit better in the world," he says. Facial animation, on the other hand, provided between half and 75 percent of the characters' final performances.

From the outset, the crew handled facial data differently than the body data. Data from the facial dots didn't drive the geometry on digital characters faces directly. "That's too limiting if you want to edit the motion later," says Saliba. Instead, Imageworks created a system



animators first tried to match videos of the actors manually, without any mo-cap reference. Then, they tested the shapes with motioncapture data of each actor saying, "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" in a variety of ways-angry, happy, sad and so forth. "The cool thing is that even if you don't have successful data, the animators can use the FACS poses," says Saliba.

The house, however, was always keyframed. "The house is why we're all here," says Kenan. "Most of my work was making sure I cared about our human characters in every scene. The house was the treat. It was our dessert after dinner."

a living interior is conveyed in the way the floor breathes and the walls undulate. That's where animation excels. You breathe life into familiar objects in new and unexpected ways."

To help create the scary look, visual effects supervisor Jay Redd, who oversaw lighting for the film, used software known as Arnold written by Marcos Fajardo that handily rendered global illumination (GI) and indirect diffusion with color bounce. "It gave us a new look," says Redd. "This is a scary movie. We wanted to reveal things through lighting tricks. We used GI and indirect diffuse from the get go, so it influenced everything. We'd get a nice bounce from a flashlight in a dark corridor. We got bounce light flaring up in fog."

In addition, Redd used depth of field and other tricks to focus the viewer as the camera moved from two inches off the ground to 30 feet in the air. "Imagine what that means for textures," he says. Painted textures created with Maxon's BodyPaint 3D combined with procedural textures dirtied up the imperfect world. Maxon's Cinema 4D helped painters create distant backgrounds.

"Our goal was to make the film look handmade," says Redd. "The skin on the characters is simple, but sometimes you see fingerprints and wrinkles and marks from tools. We even put grain on our final rendered images."

Kenan calls the result a "live-action/animation hybrid" while Redd refers to it as a "mixed media film." Both agree that the performance capture worked well for human characters in a film with an animated monster. "This kind of animation yielded lots of gray areas within every line that I found refreshing," Kenan says. "Horror is all about atmosphere, and animation is pure atmosphere." ■

Sony Pictures' Monster House opens its doors to moviegoers nationwide on July 21.



that used a series of FACS (facial action coding system) poses for each character. Using data captured from the facial performances, the system accessed the library of FACS poses and determined, frame by frame, what percentage of which shapes to change based on dot positions in 3D space.

To create the FACS shapes, Imageworks had each actor perform a series of around 80 expressions. The actors pursed their lips, lifted eyebrows and so forth, and then the modelers duplicated those shapes. To test the shapes,

Turning the house into a character required nearly 20 different rigs and around 40,000 controls to move all its parts—shingles, shutters, boards, awnings, window frames, and so forth. "Umberto Lazzari who rigged the train in The Polar Express rigged the house," says Hofstedt. "It was an amazing accomplishment."

The house not only looks alive from outside, it's alive inside, as well. Originally, the script called for the interior to be made of organic materials, but Kenan changed that. "I stripped away the red goo and snot," he says. "My idea of





# **Basic Insects**

John A. Davis and his ace team of animators unleash a CGanimated cast of bugs in the feature adaptation of The Ant Bully. by Michael Mallory

e know what you're thinking: In a year when so many animated films are giving audiences a sense of deja vu, here comes another CG film featuring a cast of ants. The filmmakers behind Warner Bros.' The Ant Bully, have heard that, too and they're ready for it.

"When people ask, 'How many ant films do we need to see?,' I say, 'How many films do you see featuring humans ... are you tired of those yet?," says animation director David Tart with a laugh.

But The Ant Bully, based on a kids' book by John Nickle, is less an ant movie than the story of a small human boy named Lucas who is bullied by others and takes out his frustration by destroying an anthill, which prompts an ant wizard (voiced by Nicolas Cage, who costars with Julia Roberts, Meryl Streep, Rob Paulsen, Paul Giamatti and Bruce Campbell) to magically shrink him down to their size so that he can be dealt with eye-to-eye.

Writer/director John A. Davis, whose Texas-based toon shop DNA Productions, which he runs with Keith Alcorn, is

best known for the Jimmy Neutron franchise, got involved with the project after being contacted by a rather auspicious fan.

"Tom Hanks used to read the book to his son and he sent me a copy to see if I had a take on it because he

liked Neutron," notes Davis. After meetings with Hanks, whose Playtone company is co-producing the film, Davis was given the Oscar-winning actor's blessing to do whatever he wanted to with it. First on the agenda was expanding the story from a fairly simple fable into more of a fantastic action-adventure, with such set pieces as a wasp attack and a full battle scene.

"I saw it as kind of a love letter to Ray Harryhausen," Davis says. The film's fouryear development and production period was also a chance to revamp the studio's



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system.

























Colorscript from The Ant Bully. Credit: Barry E. Jackson



David Tart



John A. Davis



Barry E. Jackson

literally gutted our pipeline and started from scratch on our tool set," Davis says. "We've been animating in Maya [version 6.5 for Ant Bully] for a number of years now, but gone were the days of with rendering LightWave. We fully embraced Houdini and RenderMan, and complexthe ity of our pipeline grew to the point where we were doing R&D while we were in production." (In Texas terms, Davis likens the ordeal of this transition to "an ass-whoopin.")

The human characters in The Ant Bully are not as broadly cartoony as those in Jimmy Neutron. "They got more attention in rigging and exploratory animation and were cast to stronger animators," says Tart. Meanwhile, the ant characters are a little more bug-like, walking on four legs and using the other two for arms. "In Antz and A Bug's Life, the characters pretty much look like humans in insect suits," he notes (and Tart should know since he also animated on A Bug's Life).

A particular challenge came in creating the Land of the Giants-style scenes in which the teeny Lucas interacts with his normal-sized sister in the family kitchen. "We had to build two or three



Such scenes were referred to by the animators as occurring in "Godzilla time," since from the ant's P.O.V., the humans were as slow and weighty as everyone's favorite over-cranked monster. By contrast, the ants themselves were given a near weightless quality, except for key dramatic or emotional scenes. "It's almost a literal thing," Tart muses, "that if we wanted the scene to be a little heavier, emotionally, we would throw in a little more weight in the way we animated the insects."

and the ant colony's council chambers.

A lot of time and effort was also spent on a sophisticated color script for The Ant Bully. "Every department got over five hundred finished pieces of art of what all the scenes would look like from beginning to end, and how the colors would change," says Jackson. "In the down moments, things de-saturate, and in the fantasy moments, things are in heightened saturation."

Bringing the film in for a comparatively thrifty \$48 million is an accomplishment in itself, though Davis hopes that critical judgment of his sophomore feature, which simultaneously premieres in IMAX, will not hinge on the cost. "With Neutron, we were not setting new standards in the art, other than to have people say, 'Wow, look what they did for that money!' In this film, I really want to have people say, 'Wow, look what they did!' and have it compete on every level with the stuff that's out there." ■

Michael Mallory is a Los Angeles-based journalist and author. For more info visit www.michaelmallory.com.

Warner Bros.' The Ant Bully marches into theaters nationwide on July 28.







# **Friends with Benefits**

The symbiotic connection between comic books and animation continues to blossom in 2006 and beyond. by Thomas J. McLean

f all the branches of pop culture that assemble each summer under the tree of the San Diego Comic-Con, few are as entwined as comic books and animation.

The influences go back and forth in many ways, from comic-book characters and aesthetics making their way into cartoons, to creators who are fans of and work in both fields. Their shared sensibilities are evident in everything from Duck Dodgers and The Incredibles to Tripping the Rift, Minoriteam and Ben 10and the individual influences have become almost impossible to separate.

Take Jackson Publick, creator of The Venture Bros, a parody of adventure cartoons like Jonny Quest that seamlessly integrates a comic-book sensibility into its plots and characters. Publick, who started out with a selfpublished comic book called Cement Shooz, says he fell into animation after meeting The Tick creator Ben Edlund and finds the two media have a lot in common.

"Comics are the bastard of literature and cartoons are the bastard of film, so they kind of hang out together," he says. "They're like the two nerds hanging out in the cafeteria together."

Comics have long reflected personal sto-

ries, especially when created by artists who write their own stories, such as Will Eisner or Frank Miller. Animation is more communal work, but technologies like Flash have begun to change that. "They're both good places for outsiders to tell their stories," Publick says.

Tad Stones was a comic-book fan as far back as the Silver Age. When he left Disney after 29 years, his agent asked him what he'd like to do. "I just sighed and said what I really want to do is Hellboy," he says. Stones knew Hellboy creator Mike Mignola from the Atlantis TV show they worked on, and is now directing and supervising a pair of Hellboy animated features to air on Cartoon Network and on DVD.

While Mignola's inky and moody art seems perfectly suited to animation, there are aspects to his style and the comic-book medium that made it a challenge to animate. "There are moments that work on the comic page because you're cheating time and space," Stones says. "You have to reinterpret things to make it work in animation."

For example, comics are all about cutting from image to image, which influenced the editing and led to fewer push-ins and pullouts, Stones says. The animators also reinterpreted



the look of the comic, using less black but developing more color levels and blending the characters more into the background to maintain the creepy feel of the comic. "We're telling stories of action and the supernatural and suspense and some things we're trying certainly haven't been seen in American animation," says Stones.

The dominant forces in the comic-book world have long been Marvel and DC, and both have done well adapting their characters into animation. Their animation renaissance started almost simultaneously in 1992, with the debuts on Fox Kids of the stylish and sophisticated Batman and of Marvel's detailed and hyperkinetic X-Men.

Batman in particular struck a chord. "It wasn't until (Batman producers) Alan Burnett and



Eric Rollman



Jackson Publick



Sander Schwartz

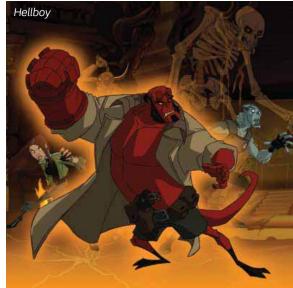


Tad Stones

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Bruce Timm and Paul Dini reacted against what had been on TV to say we can be a lot cooler than all this, that really the comicanimation connection showed up to be really strong," Stones says.

The success of Batman led Warner Bros. to adapt more DC heroes, starting with Superman and continuing through Teen Titans, Justice League, and once again back to The Batman. With the exception of Teen Titans, all those properties had been animated for TV in the past and likely will be again.

"In our business, the rule of thumb is there's a new generation of kids' audience every seven or so years," says Sander Schwartz, president of Warner Bros. Animation. "With something like Bruce Timm's Justice League





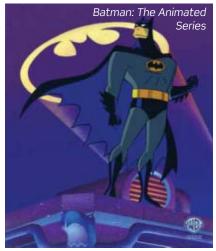
years, someone will walk in and say I've got a great idea for a new Justice League."

Up next is Legion of Super Heroes, DC's famously complicated sci-fi soap opera. After a

very serious tone on Justice League and a kid-friendly take on Teen Titans, Legion finds a middle ground to both keep the strengths of the comic intact while making it work for the target audience of boys ages six-11.

Marvel's animation has reflected its comics' action-oriented approach, most recently in direct-to-DVD features Ultimate Avengers and a forthcoming sequel. Executive producer Eric Rollman says adapting the company's wellknown comics can be difficult.

"In a comic book, you have a lot more room for your imagination to run wild," he says. "When you take it to the level of animating it you're leaving less of it to the imagination, which is why it's such a chal-



lenge to take a well-known comic book and group of characters and adapt them into another medium."

That led to using 2D animation on Ultimate Avengers to better reflect the photorealistic art of Bryan Hitch on *The Ultimates* comic book. "Because the characters are so real, it was very, very hard to do it in CGI," Rollman says. "So we found ourselves going back to basics, saying this should be a hand-drawn movie."

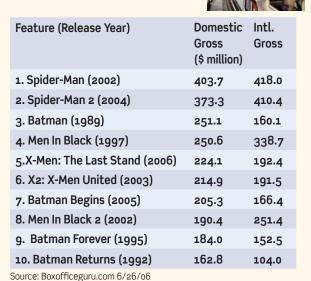
Like DC, Marvel frequently revisits its properties. A new Fantastic Four series is coming from French producer Moonscoop, while India's First Serve Toonz is preparing a new Wolverine and the X-Men series.

And while comics are the nominal focus of the annual fan pilgrimage to San Diego, the ties between comics and animation ensure that both media will continue to grow closer and benefit from each other's company.

Thomas J. McLean is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in comic book and visual effects. He also writes the popular comic-book blog, Bags and Board (http://weblogs.variety.com/bags\_and\_boards).

# Top Draws

Top 20 Comic Book Movies of All Time





# The Attack of the Comic-Book Flicks

The skinny on 20 comic-based movies coming soon to theaters near you.

30 Days of Night. Sam

(Collateral). [Release date: 2007]

Raimi is producing this adaptation of the Steve Niles horror tale about an isolated town in Alaska that is attacked by a gang of bloodsucking vampires during the dark winter season. The film will be directed by David Slade (Hard Candy) from a screenplay penned by Stuart Beattie

Director Zack Snyder (Dawn of the Dead remake)

novel about the Battle of Thermopylae, which was led by Spartan King Leonidas (played by Gerard Butler) against the Persian army. Snyder is going for a hyper-realistic shot-for-panel recreation of the comic-book novel. [Release date: March 16, 2007]

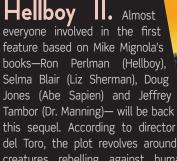
has adapted Frank Miller's graphic

Coraline. Neil Gaiman's children's book about a young girl who discovers a parallel world and new parents is being adapted into a stop-motion feature, directed by Henry Selick (James and the Giant Peach, Monkeybone) and Mike Cachuela. Dakota Fanning, Teri Hatcher, Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders lend their voices to this topnotch Laika production. [Release date: 2007]

El Muerto. Javier Hernandez's Los Comex hero comes to life in a movie directed by Brian Cox. The colorful indie film tells the story of a young man who dies on the Mexican holiday of the Day of the Dead and comes back to life as a superhero. Man about town Wilmer Valderrama (That 70s Show, CHiPS) plays the lead. Billy Drago, Maria Conchita Alonso and Tony Plana also co-star. [Release date: 2007]

Fantastic Four 2. Ioan Gruffudd, Jessica Alba, Chris Evans and Michael Chiklis are all back in this second outing for the fab four. Tim Story is directing the sequel, from a script by Mark Frost (Twin Peaks). Doom and Silver Surfer are rumored to play a part in the scenario. [Release date: June 15, 2007]

Ghost Rider. Nicolas Cage stars as Johnny Blaze, a stunt motorcyclist who fights evil spirits from beyond. Cast includes Peter Fonda as the Devil; Donal Logue as Mack, our hero's best pal and mechanic; Eva Mendes as Roxanne Simpson (love interest!) and grizzly Sam Elliot as Caretaker. Mark Steven Johnson is the movie's writer and director. [Release date: February 16, 2007]



this sequel. According to director Guillermo del Toro, the plot revolves around "mythical creatures rebelling against humanity and Hellboy trying to repress the rebellion." [Release date: Early 2007]

Iron Man. Fresh from his co-starring role in The Break Up, funnyman Jon Favreau (Elf, Zathura: A Space Adventure) is getting ready to direct this big Marvel-financed movie. Tom

Cruise was attached to the project a few years ago, but this new incarnation will probably star a new discovery in the vein of Brandon Routh (Superman Returns). The plot centers on billionaire Tony Stark, a former weapons defense tech creator who is almost killed by

an evil competitor and is forced to wear a modern-day suit of armor to survive—and fight crime, obviously. [Release date: Summer 2008]

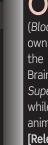
Neon Genesis Evangelion. Hideaki

Anno's manga and anime series is in early live-action film development stages thanks to the folks at

ADV Films, Gainax and Weta (who will work on the cool CG effects). Writer Matt Greenfield is currently attached to the project. The original series centers on a young boy who is enrolled by his father in an elite team of teenage giantrobot pilots to save his city from a menacing creature. [Release date: Not available]

**Opus.** Berkeley Breathed's popular penguin (Bloom County and its spin-off, Opus) gets his

own CG-animated movie thanks to the folks at Dimension and Wild Brain. Craig Mazin (Scary Movie 4, Superhero!) has delivered the script, while Breathed is working on the animation and character design. [Release date: 2007]











movie written and directed by Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud (Ratz). Marc-Antoine Robert and Xavier Rigault of 2.4.7. The Films is in production and frequent Spielberg collaborator Kathleen Kennedy (Munich, War of the Worlds) has signed on as exec producer. The Frenchversion voice cast includes Chiara Mastroianni, Catherine Deneuve, Danielle Darrieux and Simon Abkarian. [World premiere is set for the Cannes Festival, May 2007; Sony Pictures Classics will release the film in the U.S. soon after.]

riest. Based on a popular Korean comic book, published by TOKYOPOP, this feature is being produced

by Sam Raimi, Mike De Luca and Josh Donen under Raimi and Donen's recently created Sony-based ShingleShooting starts in October with director Andrew Douglas (The Amityville Horror). Storyline centers on an immortal man of God who battles demons in the Wild West! [Release date: 2007]

Sin City 2. Director Robert Rodriguez is waiting for new mom Angelina Jolie to get some free time in her schedule to proceed with this sequel.

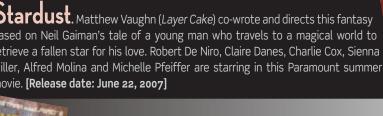
Jolie is expected to play Ava Lord. The film is based on Frank Miller's graphic noir, A Dame to Kill for, and it will be shot entirely on greenscreen. The cast includes Mickey Rourke, Clive Owen, Brittany Murphy, Michael Clarke Duncan, Rosario Dawson, Powers Booth and Jessica Alba. [Release date: 2007]

<u>Spider-IYlan</u> **5.** Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst and James Franco return as Spidey, Mary Jane and Harry in this third installment of the hugely popular franchise, as do director Sam Raimi and screenwriter Alvin Sargent. Thomas Haden Church (Sandman), Topher Grace

(Venom), Theresa Russell (Mrs. Marko), Bryce Dallas Howard (Gwen Stacy) and James Cromwell (Captain Stacy) round up the stellar cast. [Release

date: May 4, 2007]

Stardust. Matthew Vaughn (Layer Cake) co-wrote and directs this fantasy based on Neil Gaiman's tale of a young man who travels to a magical world to retrieve a fallen star for his love. Robert De Niro, Claire Danes, Charlie Cox, Sienna Miller, Alfred Molina and Michelle Pfeiffer are starring in this Paramount summer movie. [Release date: June 22, 2007]



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's delightful pizza-chomping heroes get a nice CG-animation treatment in this Imagi-produced feature, directed and written by Kevin Munroe. [Release date: March 30, 2007]

Untitled Batman Returns Sequel. Actor Christian Bale is back as the brooding superhero in this new adaptation, penned by David Goyer and Jonathan Nolan and directed by Chris Nolan. Michael Caine (Alfred), Morgan Freeman (Lucius Fox) and Gary Oldman (Jim Gordon) are part of the cast. The Da Vinci Code's sinister Silas, Paul Bettany is in talks to play The Joker in the Warner Bros. release. [Release date: 2008]



Wolverine/Magneto. Considering how well X-Men: The Last Stand has performed at the box-office this summer, the folks at Marvel and Fox can't wait to get started on these two spin-offs of the franchise. Entertainment Weekly recently named Wolverine its most popular franchise character ... and Hugh Jackman has expressed interest in a feature dedicated to the hairy mutant. David Benioff (Troy) will tackle the script. Penned by Sheldon Turner (The Longest Yard), the Magneto movie centers on a younger version of the character bent on seeking revenge from the Nazis who killed his dad, with the aid of the young Xavier. Hopefully, Sir Ian McKellen will reprise his role in one form or another. [Release date: 2007, if production problems don't mutate.]

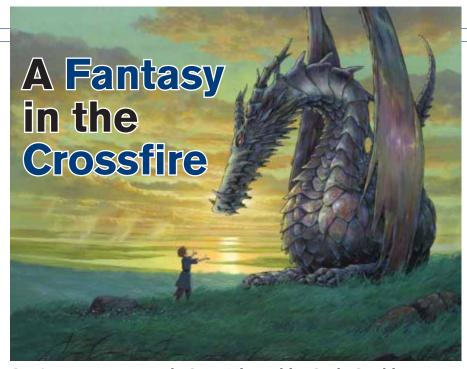
Wonder Woman. The development process for this popular Marvel heroine is

going as slow as molasses. As far as we know, producer Joel Silver and writer/ director Joss Whedon (Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Firefly) are still on board. Last year, Jessica Biel and Sarah Michelle Gellar were on top of the list, but things are constantly changing on the pic. "It's short of shifting under me," Whedon told IF Magazine recently. "I'm doing more rewriting on this than I am used to. I will not be bringing in any of the rogues gallery from the comic book. The villain is original to the film." [Release date: 2007, Diana and other comicbook Gods willing!]

**Loom.** An over-the-hill superhero (Tim Allen) has to snap a group of misfit kids into shape in this adaptation of Jason Lethcoe's graphic novel (Zoom's Academy for the Super Gifted). Directed by Peter Hewitt (The Borrowers, Garfield), the feature also stars Courteney Cox, Chevy Chase and Rip Torn. [Release date: August 11.]

Sources: Studio info, imdb.com, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter and the always informative and current reports on the Comic Book Movies website, www.efavata.com/CBM. Please note that all the movie details included in this article are subject to change at any given moment!





Controversy surrounds Goro Miyazaki's Gedo Senki, an animated adaptation of Ursula K. Le Guin's fantasy novels. (And, yes, Goro is you-know-who's son!) by Patrick Drazen

hen the son of a famous father enters the family business, there's bound to be major pressure to succeed. So you can imagine the kind of scrutiny awaiting Goro Miyazaki, son of Japanese auteur Hayao Miyazaki (Spirited Away, Howl's Moving Castle), when his first animated proiect, Gedo Senki will be released in Japan this month.

The film title's literal translation is Ged's War Journal and refers to the lead wizard in the Earthsea fantasy novels by mutiple-Hugo-winning author Ursula K. Le Guin. The movie is largely based on The Farthest Shore, the third volume in Le Guin's series, but includes elements from other Earthsea books to establish the world for the viewer.

Goro, who was in charge of running the hugely popular Ghibli Museum in Tokyo before embarking on Gedo Senki, writes extensively about his experiences on his blog: He notes that he grew up with his mother and younger brother because his father threw himself so completely into his work that he was rarely home even at night or on weekends.

"Since I was a child, my mother had been telling me, 'Don't become an animator.' I think that she didn't want me to have the same life as her husband: extremely busy with work and never having the chance to see his family. Or to enter a world where inevitably the results of my work would be exposed to the

eyes of the world, judged, and constantly compared with my father's."

He continues, "My mother's personal experience was that while her husband was receiving recognition for the wonderful works he was creating, she, for her part, was raising children almost entirely by herself, and was forced to quit the animator job she was proud of, in regard to which, she no doubt suffered feelings of shame in her heart. Even now, my mother is not wholeheartedly rejoicing that I am sitting in the director's chair... For me, Hayao Miyazaki gets zero marks as a father but full marks as a director."

The movie appears to follow the grand Studio Ghibli tradition—which may be viewed as a burden by some. Producer Toshio Suzuki recently told a Japanese publication that early character designs posed problems for the animators; "It's really difficult to design characters ... who will in one glance reveal their true nature and inner thoughts. Hayao Miyazaki's characters are powerful like that." The director ended up using his father's character designs, which may become the lens through which Goro's future films are viewed.

The film's 1,236 cuts were produced in eight months and 17 days. For the record, it took twice as long to create the animation for the Oscar-nominated Howl's Moving



Goro Miyazaki

Castle. The editing and dubbing units are working furiously to deliver the picture in time for its July premiere.

So what is the science fiction movie about? In a world out of balance, Ged (our protagonist)

searches for the cause. He meets Arren, a young prince on the same quest, and Theru, whose face has been accidentally burned. The three must learn from each other and help stop an evil wizard who has destroyed the wall between the living and the dead.

The vocal author of the Earthsea series, however, is not too happy about the liberties taken by Ghibli and the director with her fantasy novels. She has expressed her dissatisfaction with Gendo Senki, even before the film's premiere because of the depiction of race and color in the animated piece.

In LeGuin's books, two main races exist in the world of Earthsea—one with copper-colored skin and one with very dark brown skin. In addition, the heroine, the shepherdess Theru, stands out in the cast of characters because she's been very badly burned on one side of her body, can only see out of one eye and has only one functioning arm. In short, readers were handed a heroine who resembled a Hollywood zombie. In the feature, her character appears unscathed except for a red patch on one side of her "white" face. The darker races have similarly vanished.

As Nigerian children's book author Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu notes, "This is a fantasyof all places, fantasy should be where the real tolerance lives." She [Leguin] told me, 'I expect most of the characters in the Ghibli films to be white-skinned. Cool, no big deal. But don't take a novel with darker-skinned characters and whitewash them just because it's too much trouble to do otherwise." However, the author conceded at a recent sci-fi convention, that, if nothing else, the Ghibli version of her book will be "beautiful."

No argument there. ■

Patrick Drazen is a Chicago-based writer who specializes in anime. He is the author of Anime Explosion! The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation (Stonebridge Press).

Studio Ghibli's Gedo Senki premieres in Japan on July 29. For more info, visit www.ghibli.jp/ged.

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# **Superman Re-toons**

Animated DVD feature carries the torch for a beloved series by Ryan Ball

here's no denying that 2006 is the year of Superman. DC Comics' Man of Steel is back in a critically acclaimed new live-action feature from Warner Bros., and retail outlets are flooded with various home video releases including a new animated feature titled Superman: Brainiac Attacks. Warner Bros. Animation's long-awaited continuation of Superman: The Animated Series from the late 1990s has Supes matching brawn and brains with some archenemies and struggling with his feelings for an old flame.

In the film, the legendary crime fighter is about to finally divulge his identity and his feelings to Lois Lane when Lex Luthor forms an unholy alliance with Brainiac, a powerful computer bent on universal domination. During one of their brawls, Brainiac fires a force beam that injures Lois, compelling Superman to enter the mysterious Phantom Zone in search of a cure. Believing Superman to be dead, Brainiac betrays Luthor and begins his all-out assault on the city of Metropolis and ultimately Earth. The film offers non-stop action, some epic battles and just enough romance to raise the emotional stakes without repelling young boys so much like Kryptonite.

Reprising their voice roles from the series are Tim Daly (TV's Wings) as Superman/Clark Kent and Dana Delany (China Beach) as Lois Lane. Clancy Brown (HBO's Carnivale, Highlander), who voiced Lex Luthor in the show, has been replaced by Powers Boothe (HBO's Deadwood, Sin City). Meanwhile, the role of Brainiac, played by voice vet Corey Burton on TV, has been turned over to Lance Henriksen (Aliens, The Terminator).

At the helm of this latest Superman toon outing was Curt Geda, who recently directed Marvel's direct-to-vid-

feature. eo Ultimate Avengers, and is finishing up Ultimate Avengers 2: Rise of the Panther. Brainiac Attacks was written and exec produced by Duane Capizzi, who previously scripted the well-re-

ed Movie. Capizzi's other credits include The Batman series and The Return of Jafar.

Created by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel, Superman first appeared in Action Comics #1 in 1938. After a successful run on radio, the property was brought to the screen by Max Fleischer in a series of 17 animated shorts that screened theatrically from 1941 through 1943, earning an Oscar nomination along the way.

In 1996, Warner Bros. Animation producer Bruce Timm (Batman: The Animated Series) introduced a more serious adaptation of DC's last son of Krypton, winning over comic-book aficionados and animation fans alike with Superman: The Animated Series. A third volume of episodes from the show was recently released by Warner Home Video on the same day as Superman: Brainiac Attacks, which is available for the suggested retail price of \$19.98. ■





# **Out, Proud and Singing Show Tunes**

How Mike Reiss's Queer Duck landed on his webbed feet and got his own glamorous movie deal. by Ramin Zahed

ho knew the box-office and critical success of last year's landmark movie Brokeback Mountain was going to cause such a ripple in the animation world!? In June, Batwoman finally came out of the closet, and now, we have another celebrity icon carrying the torch for animated gays all over the world! Yes, Mike Reiss's Queer Duck is showing off his fabulous feathers and starring in his own feature-length movie this month on the Logo gay and lesbian cable channel, on DVD and in selected festivals in major U.S. cities.

Those of us who survived the first dotcom boom of the late 'gos will remember Queer Duck as the brilliant Flash-animated toon on the Icebox.com site, which found a new life as a successful show on Showtime. While poking fun at bigots and gay-bashers, this pioneering toon also offered a witty take on the gay and lesbian experience, as seen through the eyes of its colorful cast of characters which included Bi-Polar Bear, Oscar Wildcat and Openly Gator.

Although Showtime axed the show, Reiss



and director Xeth Feinberg finally got a chance to give our flamboyant feathered pal his own movie, thanks to the folks at Paramount's Home Entertainment division. "Showtime had commissioned ten new episodes and a movie script, but just before I turned them in, they pulled the plug," recalls Reiss, whose impressive list of animation credits include The Simpsons, The Critic, The PJs and The Oblongs. "I could never figure out their rationale, but I can guess that they wanted to get away from being seen as a gay channel. So we shopped the movie around for years and were led along by so many scrappy indies and Internet billionaires. Finally, the folks at Paramount Home Video got hold of the script and really wanted to make the movie as early as possible, so we were given one year to do the animation and deliver it. This is Paramount's first made-for-DVD animated feature."

Reiss, who is currently busy working on next summer's big Simpsons feature, says the plot for the movie was somewhat inspired by the Billy Wilder classic, Sunset Blvd. "The idea was very simple: it's the common notion of an old screen gueen marrying a gay young man. Queer Duck [voiced by JM J. Bullock], who is a male nurse, is feeling down and depressed, and he meets an old diva [Mrs. Buzzard] in the hospital. Through a Clockwork Orangelike series of treatments, he becomes uncomfortably straight, and he has to make an important



Mike Reiss

life-changing decision. Of course, I have to mention that we have 11 musical numbers in the movie!"

It's important to point out that Reiss created Queer Duck at a time when there were few positive portrayals of gay men

on TV. "This was before Will and Grace and Queer as Folk, and the four women on Sex and the City were the closest thing they had to gay men on television," he explains. "I wrote the show first as an Internet cartoon and in my cover letter, I said if this comes across as gay bashing, I'm pulling the plug." Fortunately, the feedback to Queer Duck was mostly positive. Fans were telling Reiss they wished the show had been on the air when they were confused and unhappy teenagers, desperate to see gay role models on TV.

The task of animating the brave duck's movie fell upon Xeth Feinberg and his small and dedicated team at New York City-based MishMash Media. "We put together somewhere up to 105 different Flash files, edited in Final Cut Pro in our studio," says Feinberg.



Both Feinberg and Reiss say they were thrilled to see the movie play well on the big screen at NextFest festival in New York last month. "We put a lot of attention to background design and were able to create a more organic look. You don't want to make a giant toon that looks like a web project from 2000," says Feinberg. "When we saw it for the first time, I was floored! Nobody is going to think this is a Flash movie," adds Reiss. I still don't understand why it doesn't look pixilated and granular. Xeth is a genius! There's not a frame in this movie that's not colorful and beautifully composed. I think we have a new model here. You see thousands of names go by on some of these animated features out in theaters today. I think we proved that two Jews on a home computer can also make a great-looking animated movie!" ■

Paramount Home Entertainment releases Queer Duck: The Movie on DVD on July 17.

ANIMATION MAGAZINE 24 August 2006 www.animationmagazine.net

Midori

Davs





# The Samurai Critic:

# Reviews of the latest anime releases on DVD



erhaps because they're teen-age boysand therefore clueless by definition-anime heroes often find themselves in the damnedest situations.



In Eureka Seven, 14-year-old Renton Thurston, dreams of joining the airborne mercenaries of the LFO (Light Finding Operation) aboard their ship the Gekkostate. Their leader, Holland, an ace sky-boarder, is Renton's absolute hero. But he's stuck in a life that "sucks" in a town where nothing happens—until LFO pilot Eureka crashes a giant robot-suit into the family machine shop. Her mecha is the Nervash Type Zero, which is somehow linked to Renton's heroic dead father. Renton can't decide if he's more taken with the dazzling machine or the lovely Eureka. But when he gives her another one of his father's inventions, the Amita Drive, it multiplies the power of the Nervash astronomically. The Amita Drive is somehow linked to Thurston's latent powers, so he wins a provisional berth aboard the Gekkostate. But he has a long way to go before the others accept him as a real member of the team.

The scenes of Renton, Holland and the Nervash hurtling through the skies like snowboarders whose powers have been raised exponentially are choreographed with great panache. Although they lack the polished animation and elaborate POV shots of a similar sequence in Disney's Treasure Planet, the aerial maneuvers in Eureka Seven are more exciting and more fun. The characters' piloting styles reflect their personalities more accurately. And Renton, who clumsily expresses both the cocky enthusiasm and panicky insecurity of a novice, is simply a more likeable character than the animated Jim Hawkins.

At the beginning of **Peacemaker**, 15-year-old Tetsunosuke "Tetsu" Ichimura feels like yet another example of that familiar anime type, the determined pipsqueak who triumphs through sheer force of personality. But as the series progresses, he emerges as a more complex individual. Because his parents were murdered by Imperialist agents during the troubled era between the arrival of Admiral Perry in 1853 and the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Tetsu is determined to join the Shinsengumi, a group of samurai the last Shoguns organized to protect the capital. When his older brother Tatsu gets a job as their bookkeeper, Tetsu insists they take him as well. His unwavering resolution (or mule-headedness) wins over effete swordsman Souji, who charms the redoubtable vice-commander Hijikata into accepting the boy as a page.

Tetsu imagined he'd become an avenging warrior, striking down his foes with a single swordstroke. He finds he's become the de facto mascot of the Shinsengumi: The light-hearted but formidable samurai refer to him as "Puppy Boy," tease him about being cute, and even suggest that the stern Hijikata keeps him around for sexual favors. (Can anyone imagine the characters doing that in an American animated series?) As Tetsu pursues his martial arts training, he faces a crucial decision: to continue his plans for revenge or become the "Peace Maker" his father wanted him to be. Writer Hiroshi Yamaguchi and director Tomohiro Hirata wisely shun any facile solutions to Tetsu's dilemma. The carefully balanced mixture of goofy camaraderie, flashy sword battles, good humor and introspection gives Peacemaker a satisfying



### by Charles Solomon

depth. Although some of the characters and incidents in the series are based on reality, the filmmakers take considerable liberties. Peacemaker sometimes rambles, but not badly enough to detract from its entertaining qualities.

But Renton's and Tetsu's situations feel like business as usual compared to the mess that befalls 17-year-old Seiji "Mad Dog" Sawamura in the outré romantic farce Midori Days. Unlike Tetsu and Renton, Seiji isn't cute or even likeable. He takes pride in his reputation as "the delinquent's delinquent" and uses his "demon right hand" with brutal skill in fights. One day he wakes up and finds a darling miniature girl where his right hand should be. She's a manifestation of Midori Kasugano, a smart, rich girl who has a crush on Seiji. (Her full-sized body lies in her bed at home in a sort of coma.) Exactly what a wealthy honor student at an elite

high school could possibly see in Seiji is never made clear. But Midori is only too happy to assume the role of cheery doormat, cooking and cleaning and caring for the jerk she loves. Early in the show, Seiji laments he has "no girlfriend but my right hand," and a lot of the hu-

mor is pitched at a similarly sophomoric level.

It's hard to figure out the audience Midori Days is targeting. Most girls won't enjoy the raunchy humor, the scenes of Seiji pummeling anybody he doesn't like and the cheesecake "fan service" shots, and boys will lose patience with the gooey romantic claptrap. Midori Days boasts a premise that could only work in animation, but it's so flatout weird, it makes Neon Genesis Evangelion feel downright normal. ■

Eureka Seven, Vol. 1 [Bandai: \$24.9<u>8]</u> [Anime Works: \$29.95] Peacemaker: Complete Collection [ADV Films: \$89.98]



# We Heart the '90s.

Animaniacs, Pinky and the Brain and the lost episodes of Ren & Stimpy are three of the cult TV series finding new lives on DVD this month. by Ramin Zahed

### Ren & Stimpy: The Lost Episodes [Paramount, \$26.99]

Real John Kricfalusi fans will be calling in sick this month to catch up with the glorious, rude and crazy "lost episodes" of his landmark series *Ren & Stimpy* on DVD. Originally created for Spike TV in 2002, these further adventures of Ren and Stimpy (dubbed the *Adult Party Cartoon* 



episodes) are definitely more sexual in nature than the original Nickelodeon show and are bound to offend those with delicate sensibilities, but we have a feeling John K. aficionados are going to eat up the demented duo's en-

velope-pushing antics. "Onward & Upward," "Ren Seeks Help," "Unseen and Uncensored: Man's Best Friend," "Big House Blues," "Firedogs 1 and 2" and the very adult-rated "Naked Beach Frenzy" are included in this release as are plenty of cool animatics, pencils tests, rough cuts, model sheets and background art. Dive carefully into the figments of Mr. K.'s twisted mind.

### Animaniacs: Vol. 1, Pinky and The Brain: Vol. 1 [Warner Bros, \$44.98 each]

f you've been hoping and praying that Warner Bros. would release two of the most popular animated series from the 'gos on DVD, your prayers will be answered on July 25. That's when the first volumes of *Animaniacs* and *Pinky and the Brain* hit the stores in grand style. *Animaniacs:* Vol. 1 features the first 25 episodes of the Steven Spielberg-produced toon, which debuted in September 1993 on Fox TV. Directed by Rich Arons and Peter Bonerz and featuring brilliant voice work by the likes of



Rob Paulsen, Jess Harnell, Tress MacNeille, John Mariano, Chick Vennera and Nancy Cartwright, the wacky toon chronicled the madcap adventures of the Warner Brothers, Yakko and Wakko and their sister, Dot, who were so far removed from sanity that they had to be locked up in the water tower at the legendary studio. The five-disc set offers over nine hours of inspired and hectic episodes, jammed with clever popculture references. (Remember the minimusical, Les Miseranimals?)

Of course, your collection wouldn't really be complete if you don't have the first volume of the *Pinky and the Brain* series as well. Released on the same date, this DVD features more Looney Tunes-inspired episodes starring our favorite lab rats (voiced

by Maurice LaMarche and Rob Paulsen) as they try over and over again to take control of the world. (Don't miss the late, great Roddy McDowell's turn as Snowball, the genius hamster.) Here's your chance to immerse yourself in all those mid-'gos pop culture jabs as you soak in the twisted world of Acme Lab. Come on, where else are you going to find sterling exchanges like "Are you pondering what I'm pondering?" followed by, "I think so, Brain, but we are already naked!" As our heroes would say, "Narf, poit, zort and troz!"

### The Best of She-Ra: Princess of Power [BCI Eclipse, \$24.99]

t must be a sibling rivalry thing: Now that He-Man has his own cool set of DVDs, his twin sister She-Ra is also getting in on the act. This month BCI releases the perfect nostalgic item for the children of the '80s, a two-DVD set which includes the origin-of-our-heroine movie *The Se-*

cret of the Sword, and five special She-Ra episodes of the Filmation toon produced by Lou Scheimer and Norm Prescott, as selected by fans. Also included in the package is a documentary feature about the making of the series which includes in-



terviews with voiceover actors (Melendy Britt voiced the princess), and audio commentary provided by Scheimer, Larry DiTillio, Gwen Wetzler and Alan Oppenheimer and hosted by Andy Mangels. Collectible art cards, music-video featurette with sheet music singalong, Spanish-language audio, full scripts and special Easter Eggs are all part of this royal package. Long live the powerful princess, the defender of Crystal Castle!

# **Hot Discs**

The following animated titles are performing well on the weekly amazon. com DVD charts this month.



- 1. The Venture Bros., Season 1
- 2. Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children
- 3. Justice League, Season 2
- 4. Superman: The Animated Series, Vol. 3
- 5. Beavis & Butt-Head: Mike Judge Collection, Vol. 2
- 6. The Simpsons, Season 8
- 7. Schoolhouse Rock! 30th Anniversary
- 8. South Park, The Complete 7th Season
- g. Robot Chicken, Vol. 1
- 10. Samurai Jack, Season 3

Source: amazon.com, 6/15/06

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# **A Cure-All Comic-Con Wonder Tonic**

Here are a few reasons you can't afford to miss Comic-Con this year! By Sarah Gurman

Do your superpowers (creative or otherwise) feel depleted? Is your brain geting sluggish at the light table? Or are you just craving an all-out comic book binge? Luckily Comic-Con is returning to the San Diego Convention Center for its 37th year (July 20-23) loaded with good stuff to remedy your earth-dwelling ailments. Step right up folks and let Comic-Con bathe you in its healing forces!

•Each night we have the luxury of sleeping soundly and not giving the ongoing threat of the Blockheads a second thought. That's all thanks to one green bendable man who's turning 50 this year! It's time to give it up for **Gumby** and his creator, **Art** Clokey, who will be walking the San Diego Convention Center floor and probably sparking a claymation Renaissance.

•Cartoon Network is bringing a fab collection of its series creators to tickle your toon fancy. Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends bright mind Craig McCracken and Squirrel Boy vision-

> ary Everett Peck will be among the CN innovators giving their two cents during panels, and their signatures if you're lucky. And all the nightriders who enjoy Adult Swim's stereotype-wielding Minoriteam will be happy to know that Adam de la Pena, Todd James and Peter Girardi (who have definitely put a

unique spin on the superhero yarn) will also be joining the party.

•Feeling inspired to take the comic career plunge

yourself? Comic-Con's Portfolio Review Area in the Sails Pavilion, where companies take a load off to look for new talent, is a great spot to get your start. The Artists' Alley also offers a great opportunity to strut your stuff.

•If you're trying to crank out an animated adaptation of your favorite comic, you should definitely catch up with the masters of the craft from Warner Bros. Animation. In addition to putting on a Bruce Timm retrospective, the superpower-minded crew will be hosting panel discussions on *The Batman* and their new Legion of Super Heroes series. Also don't miss the screening of the direct-to-video feature Teen Titans: Trouble in Tokyo. •It's hard to believe that it's been 40 years since Gene Roddenberry's Star Trek first captivated viewers with the intergalactic adventures of the Starship Enterprise. Of course, Comic-Con is the

perfect place celebrate the milestone, especially Walter since Koenig,



played promising navigator come ladies' man Pavel Chekov, will be on hand at the fest. As if you weren't already chomping at the Trekie bit, be sure to check out the USS Enterprise studio scale replica that will be on display courtesy of Master Replicas! Go on, you know you want to say it: "Beam me up Scotty."

•Chalk this one up to the kindness of the direct-to-DVD gods. Though we'll have to wait until August 8 to get Ultimate Avengers 2 on disc, Marvel is treating eager fans to a screening of the second round of animated adventures for Captain America (who's racked up 65 years of patriotic bravery) and his all-star team featuring Iron Man, Thor, Giant Man, Wasp and the Incredible Hulk.

• The Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards gala promises to be an exciting event this year with such a diverse bunch making it onto the nomination list. Comic gurus Chris Ware and Warren Ellis should be walking with a bounce in their step as Ware has racked up seven noms (four for his self-published Acme Novelty Library 16) and Ellis has six (Desolation Jones and Ocean are among his nominated works).

•So many special guest so little time. Attendees should keep their eyes and ears

peeled for John Wagner, the co-creator with artist Carlos Ezquerra of Britain's most famous comic crimefighter Judge Dredd whose graphic novel A History of Violence inspired

last year's critically acclaimed live-action feature. Also look out for young Eragon scribe Christopher Paolini, and if you do catch him, be sure to ask how you get onto the New York Times bestseller list when you're only 19!

•Lost withdrawal has officially set in for many of us—watching the re-runs on DVD just isn't the same.

Thankfully, the folks behind Oceanic Flight 815 will be hitting the Comic-Con stage to talk shop for the third year in a row—the first ever preview of the show happened at Comic-Con '04, and word on the street is that Jorge Garcia, the man behind island nice guy Hurley, will be making an appearance.



•There's sumptuous viewing to be had at the Independent Film Festival and toon-heads will get instant gratification because the animation screenings will take place on day one. With showings

of Claudio Castelli's Giocattoli Futuristi, Gorgonas from Salvador Sanz and Fantastic Fortune from Animation Magazine's very own comic man, Mike Fisher, this event is not to be missed.

For more info about the confab, visit www.comic-con.org.

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aithful readers of this publication are familiar with the concept of our annual Pitch Party by now, which is timed to coincide with the booming Comic-Con event in San Diego. This "party" is really an extremely targeted advertising campaign designed to help indie and up-andcoming artists present their pitches to a blue-ribbon panel of animation industry execs, agents and creative talent. The contestants who purchased a 1/6<sup>th</sup> ad in this issue got the opportunity to display their colorful pitches to our experts and get feedback from these A-List pros. We are pleased to report that this year's top prize-winner, Heath Cecere, will be presenting his pitch to the judge of his choice in person. As part of his prize package, he'll also be reimbursed his entry fee. On behalf of all of us at Animation Magazine, we wish Heath the very best in his very promising toon career.

We'd also like to thank each and every one of our wonderful 2006 contenders. Remember to stay true to your vision and original inspirations. Just because you didn't get enough votes to win this year doesn't mean that you should give up on your clever ideas. We'll share the judges' feedback with you, and you may choose to fine-tune, polish and execute your toon pitches for your next meetings with toon town's decision makers. Don't' forget the words of oftquoted Hollywood screenwriter William Goldman: "No matter how diamond-bright your ideas are dancing in your brain, on paper they are earthbound."

# Class of 2006



# First Place: Heath Cecere's Happy-Go-Lucky

Los Angeles-based artist Heath Cecere tells us that Happy-Go-Lucky, which was the top pick of our judges this year, just kind of popped up in his head one day. The solid character design, which has a slightly dark, goth influence went hand in hand with the premise which was pitched as "The delightful stories of a boy named Happy, a dog name Lucky ... and how they're both neither." The Gotham Group's founder and CEO Ellen Goldsmith-Vein, Kids' WB!'s senior VP/GM Betsy McGowen and Jetix Europe senior VP of programming Michael Lekes all praised the art work and character design. Meanwhile, Spawn creator and toy tycoon Todd McFarlane commented, "Nice play on words. Going against type has a potential. I'd like to see a better logo!"

Cecere is currently working on the new Spider-Man game for Activision. His toon career also includes stints at Boston house Olive Jar and Nickelodeon in Burbank. He says he's already developed a rich back story for his pitch ("He's the 13<sup>th</sup> kid born to a superstitious mom..."). A huge fan of Rocko's Modern Life and Camp Lazlo, the 32-year-old Cecere says he also loves everything that's on [adult swim] these days. We have a feeling we're going to see a lot more of his creative ideas in the near future.



### Second Place: Brian Smith's Monster in a Box

Not surprisingly, McFarlane gave high marks to Monster in a Box, created by Brian Smith and produced by EggPlant, Prods. of Toronto. Placing second with the judges, the series of two-minute shorts has various poor saps opening the box and unleashing wild, unpredictable, destructive and disgusting hilarity. "Imaginative idea!" says Goldsmith-Vein. Smith's creation would be perfect as interstitial shorts for The Sci-Fi Channel or

as a series offered on iPods and other hand-held devices.

# Third Place: Leo Antolini's Surgeon Sturgeon

Academy of Art University grad Leo Antolini hit the jackpot last year with his smart pitch about the tenuous friendship between a mongoose and a snake (Edgar & Kip). This year, he takes the third place with another clever concept...the title alone simply explains the concept! Most of our judges thought this one to be more appropriate for adult audiences. Radar Cartoons and Mike Young Productions development exec Rita Street pointed out,



"It's super hard to sell an adult comedy show, but this one, if it's well-written, might have a chance. I like that it appears to be a super over-the-top soap opera."

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# Let's Give it Up for This Year's Brilliant Judges and their top picks, of course)



Peter Gal Director of Animation Development Nickelodeon Favorite: Monster in a Box



Michael Maliani Chief Creative Officer DIC Entertainment Favorite: Stupid Powers



Ellen Goldsmith-Vein Founder/ CEO The Gotham Group Favorite: Happy-Go-Lucky



Todd McFarlane McFarlane Companies and Spawn Creator Favorite: Travelers



Nate Hopper Senior VP of Development Sony Pictures Animation Favorite: Malfaryus; Best Enemies; The Infinity Devastator Goes to Work



Betsy McGowen Senior Vice President/General Manager Kids WB! Favorite: Malfaryus



Max Howard **Executive Producer** Exodus Film Group Favorite: The Buddras; Monster in a Box



Rita Street Executive Producer/ Producer's Representative Radar Cartoons Favorite: The Enigmas; Piddles & Chubba;



Michael Lekes Senior VP of Programming Jetix Europe Favorite: Guardian



Nick Weidenfeld Manager of Program Development Cartoon Network 's [adult swim] Favorite: Surgeon Sturgeon; Isabelle Did It!!!; Harold Hickenbottom

# Animation Magazine Staff Proks

First Place: Surgeon Sturgeon by Leo Antolini **Second Place:** Happy-Go-Lucky by Heath Cecere Third Place: Out of Order by Out of Order Comics; [Tied with] Piddles & Chubba by Heath Cecere

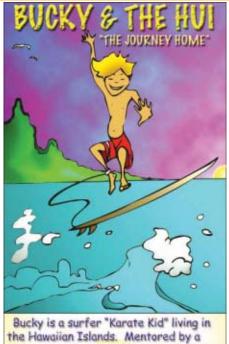


Readers Picks

First Place: Grandpa by Samuel T. Nelson Second Place: Bucky & The Hui by Buck Woodall Third Place: Best Enemies

by Alice Lin

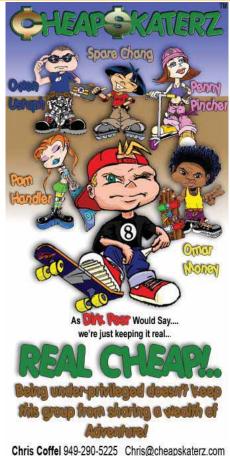




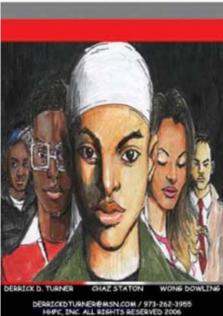
wise native Hawaiian elder. Bucky thrives in a world rich in ancient Gods, mythology and folklore.

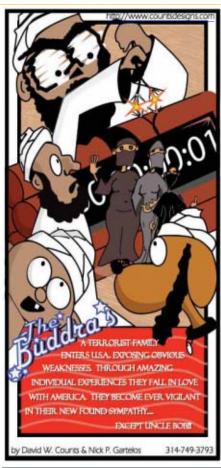
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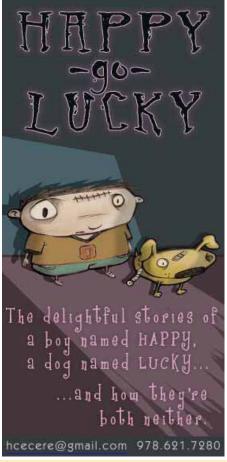






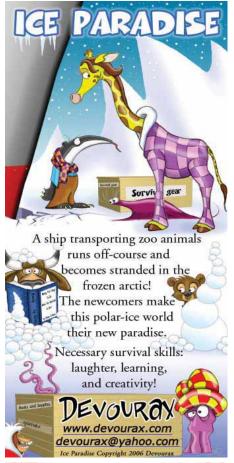




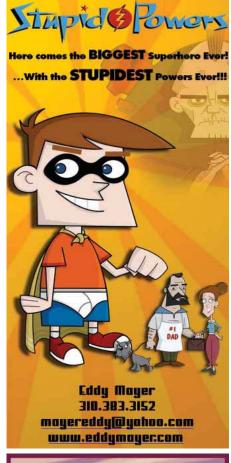


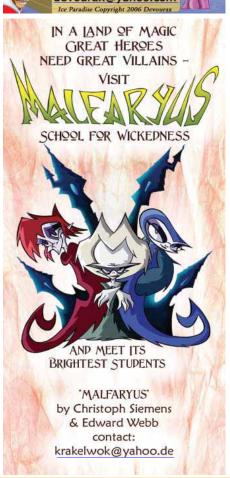
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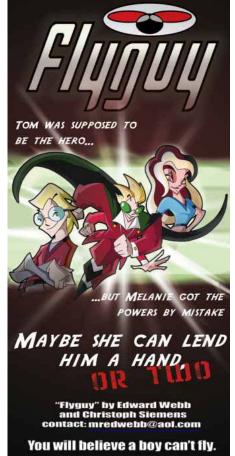




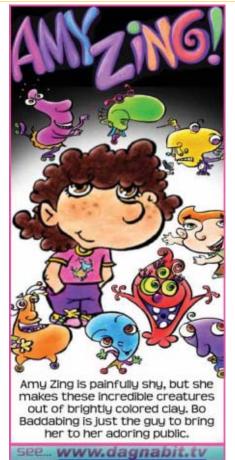




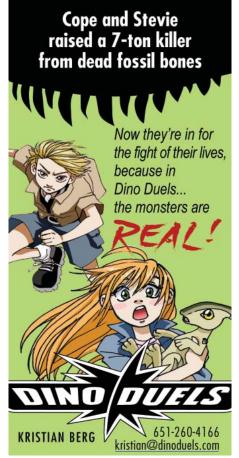
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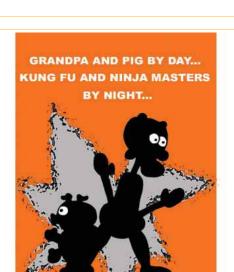








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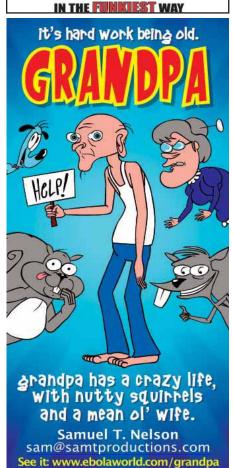
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KUNG FU GRAMPS

NINJA PIG







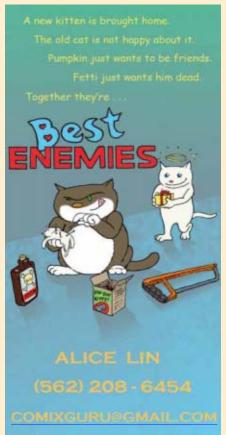




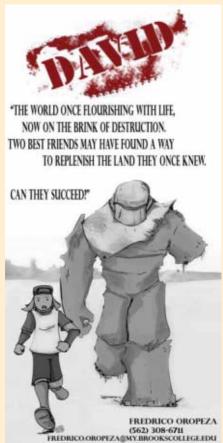


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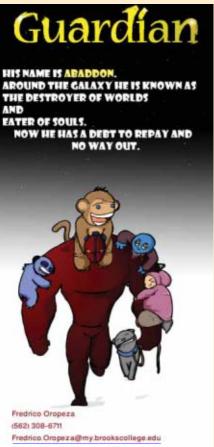








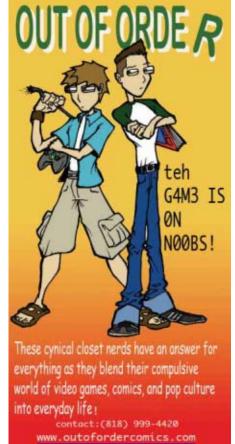




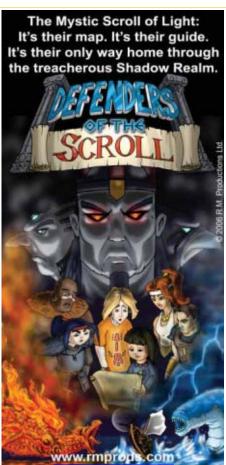


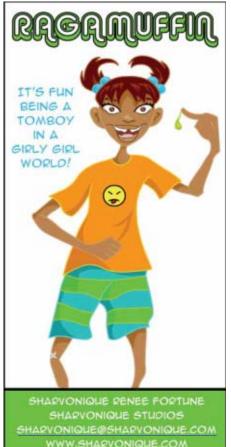
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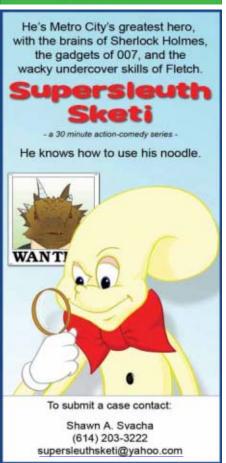
PITCH PARTY 2006













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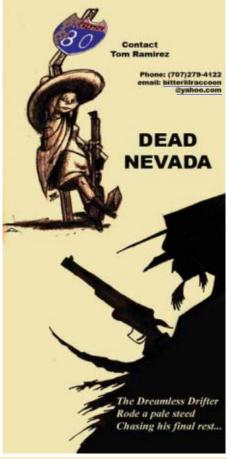
up and played space hero, it was

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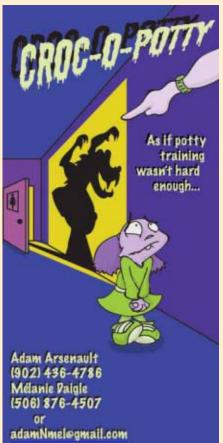


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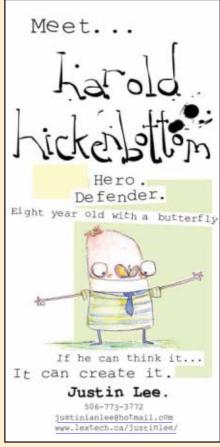
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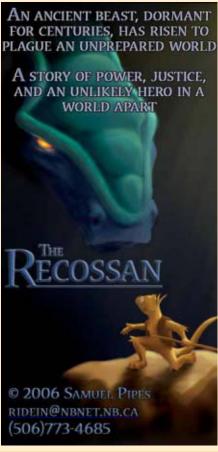




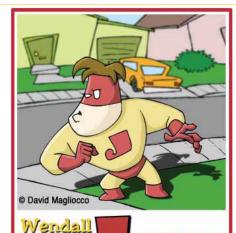








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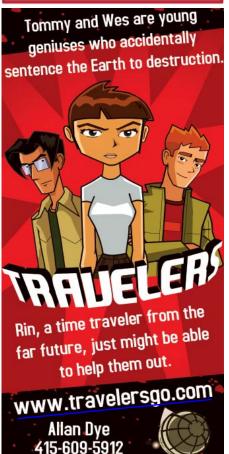


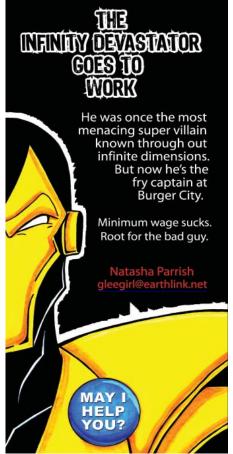
A self-proclaimed nonsuper, super hero, 35 year old Wendall Justice doesn't let his shortness, or his still living at home with his mother, stop him from helping out the little guy...Just don't call

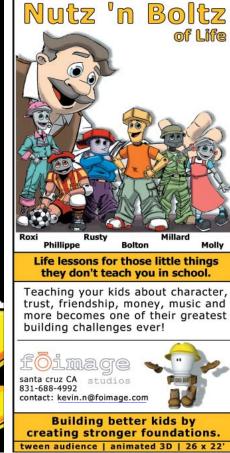
HIM little!...

Creator Contact Info: David Magliocco/Driscal Designs P.O.Box 1878 Suisun City, CA 94585 707-864-1577 eMail: info@driscal.com

www.driscal.com

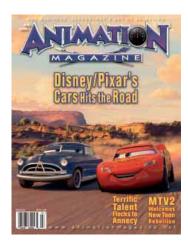






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# The Padded Cel

# **Superheroines in Comfortable Shoes: From DC to P.C.**



by Robby London

t was just over a year ago that animation's quiet little corner of the media universe was rocked by headlines screaming that SpongeBob SquarePants was gay. Of course this was exposed as a tabloid fabrication when S-Bob responded by outing himself as a practicing asexual. As a fellow member of Abstainers Anonymous, I was on hand personally to welcome Bob into our community until I realized he belonged to a different branch—the voluntary division.

But this time it's for real. DC Comics has officially announced a new incarnation of Batwoman who is....drum roll ... a lesbian! That's right! Could a name change to "AC-DC Comics" be far behind? We're told she has "flowing red hair, knee-high red boots with spiked heels and form-fitting black outfit." Obviously either a lesbian or a Congressional intern. Politics aside, this likely comes as depressing news—on a strictly hormonal level—to a meaningful segment of Batwoman's demographic: prepubescent guys in their 40s who are

delusional. (At press time, Comic-Con in San Diego had been put on mass suicide watch.) On the other hand, there will be a certain appeal to those men with "lesbian conversion fantasies." (We're told that such men exist...just ask Anne Heche's husband, you know, the cameraman who stole her from Ellen whatshername.)

DC Comics reportedly framed this decision in a context of portraying diversity. Here at The Padded Cel we are totally committed to diversity and approve wholeheartedly. In fact, we urge DC to feature lesbians from a wide array of ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds and in as many different costumes as possible.

It also got us to thinking about other ideas to help bring some of our favorite DC concepts in line with contemporary sensibilities and values:



The Dual-Identity Thing: Is it healthy for comics to trivialize the debilitating psychiatric condition known as multiple personality disorder? This frightening disease afflicts a broad segment of the population—if the entertainment industry is any indication.

X-Ray Vision: A subversive and sexist invitation to perverted voyeurism. (This as opposed to the healthy kind.) Not even Superman could resist. Hell, the Pope couldn't resist. Talk about invasion of privacy? If there were such a thing as X-Ray Vision, it should be placed under the strict control of the Bush administration whom at least we can trust not to abuse it!

Men Wearing Tights and Capes: Do we really need more of this in the world? If you think we do, apparently you aren't at Comic-Con. (And

we're not even going to discuss how much the execs at Warner Bros. are sweating over the questionable sexual preference of the new Man of Steel in Bryan Singer's live-action movie!)

Public Safety: Has anyone once heard Superman consult with air traffic control? This represents the epitome of irresponsibility. You think the Man of Steel can't get his alloy ass sucked into an engine and bring down a 747? And what if it came down on Marvel Headquarters? Just imagine the conspiracy theories. Michael Moore and Oliver Stone...are you listening?

Glamorizing Gas Guzzlers: One word: Batmobile.

Justice League: Just how likely is it that they'd all be bulked up like that? The only way to regain the public trust is steroid testing. Why should the Justice League be different than any other league in America?

Time Travel Into the Past ... by flying around the globe in the opposite direction of its rotation. Maybe it's time to update this concept based on current knowledge of general relativity and worm holes? On the other hand, has anyone actually tried it? Just think—if it worked, you could travel back in time and avoid this column entirely!

And as for Batwoman? According to DC "she introduces herself to comic book readers by striking her ex-girlfriend right across the jaw."

So now YOU tell her she can't get married! ■

Robby London is an animation industry veteran who is currently pitching a show featuring She-Ra, Xena and Red Sonja stranded on an island, with very limited clothing options.

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# **Bushy-Tailed Pandemonium**

Cartoon Network's new series Squirrel Boy offers character-driven comedy infused with the witty charms of a squirrel and his favorite boy. by Sarah Gurman



Squirrel Boy introduces CN viewers to the adventures of 10-year-old Andy Johnson (voiced by Pamela S. Adlon) and his best friend/pet Rodney J. Squirrel (played by Richard Horvitz). Rodney, a big-headed and persuasive little guy with a knack for finding mischief, enjoys the perks of his domesticated life. Whether he's trying to help Andy earn a Badger Scout badge or the duo is concocting an enterprising sandwich scheme to raise money for an irresistible Fobject (that's a fun object), the show's spin on the best buddies thread and pet-owner dynamic makes for delectable half-hour doses of laughter.

Andy's dad, Mr. J (Kurtwood Smith), adds to the commotion as he disapproves of his son's trouble-making pet



squirrel (though the often-oblivious Rodney thinks he and pops are chums). And Rodney's best squirrel friend Leon, who gets a comic boost from Tom Kenny's voice box, also brings some fun to the table with his preference for the the wild life.

Show creator and exec producer Everett Peck, whose impressive credits include Duckman, Rugrats, The Critic and the Jumanji series, had his first animated squirrel revelation a few years ago. "Most ideas that I get for stuff really come from my sketchbook and just drawing," he says. "One day I was drawing this kind of squirrel character. He had heavy eyebrows and stuff and I thought, oh that's kind of a fun, kind of a little bit of a curmudgeon, know-it-all kind of a character." Outspoken animals seem to have provided a springboard for projects throughout Peck's career. "I just like animating animals because the silhouettes are so interesting and so the squirrel is just a compelling little guy," he says.

Once Peck had the squirrel character pinned down, the series evolved from the idea of a pet-owner relationship. "It's always been something I thought was a rich source of comedy," he says. And certainly, a strong bond with a pet is something most kids can relate to and find appealing. "I had a great dog when I grew up," he recalls, "I didn't have a squirrel though ... I thought that'd be a cool little oddball pet to have." Peck came up with Andy shortly after Rodney. "I was drawing a kid who's a little A.D.D. or just insecure enough to actually take advice from a squirrel," he says. "So that's sort of how it began—just kind of sketching around and just kind of putting those two characters together."

The show's brightly colored 2D animation and inviting stylized backgrounds certainly make Andy and Rodney look great together. "Really, most of my career I was an illustrator and a painter, and I still am, so I really have definite ideas about how things should look," Peck says. "I have quite a variety of interest in different visual styles, but I wanted a kind of feel to this like it was a bright Saturday morning."

He describes Squirrel Boy as a backyard show because the storylines usually don't follow Andy to school. Each episode just feels like a Saturday morning with Andy and Rodney palling around the neighborhood and digging up trouble. "I remember when I was a kid watching the old Warner Bros. shorts and some of the scenes just looked cool, like you just really wanted to jump in there," he says. "It looked better than what you saw out of your own window. And so what I wanted to try and do was

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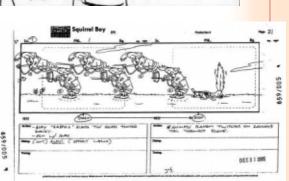
Squirrel Dad: Series creator Everett Peck poses with his

rector Raymie Muzquiz, color supervisor Craig Simmons, background designer = Steve Meyers character and design supervisor

Jerry Richardson are all veterans of Duckman and other Peck projects over the years. "We all know each other and I respect all of their abilities so it just makes it a real pleasure to work with people like that," Peck explains. "I consider them the very best and so whenever I get 💈 something going I always try to get my group together." However, he is quick to point out that there are some new faces in the mix on Squir-

rel Boy that are working out quite nicely. "This is the first show I've worked on with Chris Painter, who's the story editor, and we have four writers that we work with and get story ideas together. He's done a fantastic job," he says.

So where is the crew taking Rodney and Andy on their future Cartoon Network adventures? Upcoming episodes will bring the charismatic pair to a swap meet where Rodney will teach Andy his version (!) of nuanced negotiation, and there will be some quality comedic competition at the melon box derby. Like all



close buds, Rodney and Andy will also have a fight and start conducting interviews for new best friends. That's just a taste, folks! According to Peck, the best is yet to come: "I just think the later stories, I mean the ones we're working on now, have gotten even better now that we've gotten a better sense of the characters and gotten the cast really up to speed, and I feel like we're really getting some momentum now."

Squirrel Boy premiered on Cartoon Network in May and will air regularly on Fridays at 7 p.m. beginning July 14.

create a world where it was always sort of an appealing world that a kid would just like to jump into and go climb that tree or something."

Rough Draft Studios (Dexter's Laboratory, The Life and Times of Juniper Lee), the Korea-based toon shop that also has a Glendale office, provides the animation on the series. Peck points out that his hard-working team is involved with the visual production process as much as possible. "We do a lot of the work here in terms of all of the preliminary preparation," he notes. "We're fastidious about getting as much detailed information together to send overseas before they even begin the animation process as we can."

Squirrel Boy's digital animation gives the crew a greater opportunity to put their personal stamps on the animation. "We do a lot of color work here and because we're doing everything digitally, they're not painting any backgrounds overseas," Peck explains. "They basically can use pretty much what we send them or at least pull textures and colors right from our comps so they can create the backgrounds. So the backgrounds look very, very close to what we send them."

For much of the production crew, coming to work on this new series meant a creative team reunion. Squirrel Boy di-

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# **Objects of Our Affection:**

# A few things that grabbed our attention

## Make Your Own Island Purgatory

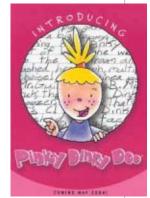
We've got some good news for those of you going though **Lost** withdrawal. Now that the show is in rerun mode through the summer, you can be happy that McFarlane Toys will launch a line of action figures based on



characters from the popular TV show. The toys will be released this fall, to complement the show's third-season premiere. Meanwhile, Ubisoft has also signed onto a longterm, worldwide licensing agreement with Touchstone Television to develop and publish a video game based on the franchise. The game, scheduled for release in 2007, will be developed by Ubisoft's Montreal studio and will be available for home, portable consoles and PCs. We can't wait to play with our own Hurley collectible as it tries to resist the temptations of a half-empty bag of Chee-

Last month, we wrote about Jim Jinkins and his cool new animated show on Noggin Pinky Dinky Doo. Now we hear that **Gund** has been licensed by Sesame Workshop to create a whole product line based on the show. The preschool toon originated as a series of bedtime tales Jinkins made up to

entertain his own kids. It features a bright seven-yearold with a great imagination who solves everyday problems through fantastical storytelling. Personally, we think her awesome blue pet, Mr. Guinea Pig, is going to make a fan-



tastic plush toy for young fans of the show.

# **Say Hello to My Little Undead**

A couple of years ago, zombie movie fans embraced Shaun of the Dead, a sly, tongue-in-cheek



feature directed by British auteur Edgar Wright. We were excited to discover that NECA is releasing a new line of action figures based on the clever cult hit. Halloween

is still four months away, but you may want to pre-order your Shaun of the Dead 12-inch action figure, which comes with cricket bat and base as well as an interchangeable left hand with flower bouquet. And, yes, our little pal also yells out several key lines from the movie. Come on, people, when was the last time \$32.99 gave you so much pleasure?

## The Unflushables

We pride ourselves in bringing you the most amazing, cutting-edge discoveries in the world of toys and licensing! That's why we were

fighting tears when we heard



on her yellow and brown-colored friends. As the website explains, "The soft cud-

dly toys elegantly integrate form and function in a playful and disarming manner ... and address the taboo-surrounded subject of bodily functions in an amusing, yet aesthetic manner." Yes, you can use these attractive plush toys (both Pee and Poo are included in a \$30 package) to teach the kids all about potty training. FYI, you can also order up little T-shirts, underpants, socks, key chains and even removable tattoos on the duo's web store. For more info, visit www.peeandpoo.com

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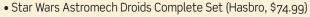
# The Bagel Bun Hairstyle is Back

Some may say we've visited George Lucas' evergreen *Star Wars* franchise too many times for our own good. But how can anyone deny the instant market appeal of Gentle Giant's upcoming macquette featuring Genndy Tartakovsky's *Clone Wars* Princess Leia Organa with the faithful R2-D2

standing beside her. We're sure actress Carrie Fisher is going to be thrilled to see this very animated poly-resin version of her screen character, poised gracefully to wreak havoc against the forces of the Dark Side. To order this \$80 beauty, visit www.gentle-giantltd.com.

# **Hot Items**

The following are some of the most popular items bought on the toy and collectible website, <u>entertainmentearth.com</u>, last month:



- Corpse Bride Movie Poster Action Figure Set (McFarlane, \$25.99)
- Superman Mini Statue (Diamond Select, \$54.99)
- Pirates of the Caribbean Davey Jones Key Replica (Master Replicas, \$14.99)
- Speed Racer Mach 5 Playset (Toynami, \$24.99)
- King Kong V-Rex Skull (Weta Collectibles, \$39.99)
- Classic Peanuts Charlie Brown Bobblehead (Funko, \$11.99)
- Buffy, Dawn & Glory Action Figure Set (Diamond Select, \$29.99)
- Mini Baby Godzilla Plush (Toy Vault, \$11.99)

Source: www.entertainmentearth.com, 6/10/06





#### **Our Favorite Demon-Samurai**

The Japanese toon **Naruto** has been a popular staple of Cartoon Network's

Toonal Studio young Althou Dragol side. a hot

Toonami block since September of last year. The highly addictive Studio Pierrot production chronicles the colorful adventures of a young samurai in training who is seen as a demon by most adults. Although some find too many resemblances to shows such as *Dragon Ball Z*, the series' popularity is continuing to build Stateside. Created by manga artist Masashi Kishimoto, the show has also spawned

a hot series of books published by VIZ, which constantly appear on Bookscan's

bestseller chart.

Not surprisingly, this summer we came across numerous *Naruto-*related toys and games in stores. Licensees such as Bandai, Banpresto, GE and Mattel



could be making a killing from all the action figures, lunchboxes, playing cards, towels and plastic fans, as well as pillows, cell-phone attachments and hand-held devices. Frankly, nothing says summer is finally here better than taking your giant Naruto beach towel out of storage and out to the beach. The frog-head coin collector isn't too shabby either!



#### Pirates' Treasure

This month's much-anticipated *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* is expected to do gangbuster business at the box office. Not surprisingly, you can expect a lot of cool tie-in toys and collectibles in stores this July and August as well. **NECA** is launching some remarkably accurate depictions of Johnny Depp, Kiera Knightley and Orlando Bloom with its 12-inch replicas of Jack Sparrow, Elizabeth Swann and Will Turner. We have a soft spot for the spooky Davey Jones item—that's the haunting pirate with all kinds of squid-like tentacles coming out of his face, played by Bill Nighy! Collect them all, if ye dare, and you'll be set for Talk Like a Pirate Day (that's September 19). In other words, ARRRRRRRRR!

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o ho ho, those scurvy pirates are back-and more menacing and bizarre than ever in Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest. All of which came as a relief to ILM visual effects supervisor John Knoll (Star Wars Episodes I-III), who feared director Gore Verbinski and company had used up all the best high-seas hijinks the first time around. "What do you do in a sequel that you didn't do in the first one?" Knoll asks. "I should not have doubted their creativity because there's all these great things: the Flying Dutchman, Davey Jones's crew, a sea monster, Cannibal Island."

All of these elaborate plot developments and characters explain why ILM's workload more than doubled on the second installment, which was in production back to back with Pirates 3. Fortunately, Knoll's vast experience in the Star Wars universe gave him a terrific advantage when it came to tackling intense character-driven shows like the Pirates of the Caribbean trilogy.

For the original Pirates, when the script called for Captain Barbossa and his ghostly crew to transform into skeletons, Knoll and his animators were forced to match-move the CG bones to the motions of the actors by hand. "Because we shot the actors in live action, we couldn't put tracking markers or anything on their costumes, so we just match-mated those guys with a very brute force, manual labor process," Knoll sighs. "Going into Pirates 2, we knew that Davey Jones and his crew were going to be exclusively computer graphics, so I wanted to take the opportunity to figure out what can we do to help make that manual interpretive process of matching our CG characters to the actors' live performances a little more faithful?"

Since Davey Jones and his scurvy henchman have human forms with heads of various sea creatures-Jones himself has a face full of tentacles, while others have shark heads and so on-Knoll wanted to figure out a means of recording the actors' movements on set, then translating that data into the digital realm so the actors' actual performances could be used to drive those of their CG counterparts. "I wanted to get higherquality performances that were more faithful to what the actors were doing on set," Knoll explains. "So we started with excellent actors who played the characters on-set, like Bill Nighy as Davey Jones, but then I desperately wanted to avoid that process that's inevitably happened on a lot of films I've worked on with CG creatures, where you work one on one with the director on the character animation in post-production. There gets to be a lot of, 'Can you speed him up here?' or 'Slow him down there?' and the whole thing ends up with an artificial character that's just not the way it is when you're working with live action." Knoll continues, "My thought was, 'Why don't we shoot it like it was any other live action? In fact, why don't we just treat the CG characters as if they were

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live action?' Really, there should be an actor owning that performance—a good actor working with the director in the same way as any live actor on set so the DP can light him, the operator can frame him, and then later in post the editor can cut those performances just like with live action. Then, put the computer-generated character into the shot, and you get all those other things that come with live action—you get the performance that happens on the set, the same dynamic as the rest of the movie."

Knoll's solution to the challenge was MoCap Lite. "We got together with R&D to come up with some really low footprint lightweight things that we could take down to the set and get good motion-capture quality performances without all the stuff that goes along with it: the 16 witness cameras and all the demands for a clear view and ideal lighting conditions. It's a huge footprint. If I wanted to bring a whole motion capture system with me on set, every-

one would hate me! It slows everybody down. We came up with what we're calling Eyemo-cam—the actors wear gray suits with tracking markers that are a little different than the typical motion capture balls: bands with a checkerboard pattern that go around the actor's arms, wrists and elbows, which give us a better shot at calculating the joint positions and where the skeleton really is inside the arm. Besides the film camera we use two Eyemo HD witness cameras, so long as at least two of the cameras are seeing

a band we can get pretty good data and do a reasonably good job of reconstructing the performances."

Interestingly, not having so many views makes the new system more forgiving when the Eyemo-cam data is translated into ILM's animation program, Xeno. "After that step, it's really the same as any other animation, except you've got this brilliant live performance as reference to work from," Knoll explains. "We wrote a tool called Compare that lets our animators do a side-by-side comparison of their animation against the original performance reference plate. That way, they can run through and critically evaluate the animation performance to make little tweaks by checking how the actor's sneer on this frame is a little more extreme—he sort of puckers his lips a little tighter and really make the animated character do that."

The visual effects dynamo says he's quite pleased with the results. "We're getting much more faithful CG performances," Knoll grins. "I think we're really doing a pretty good job of bringing what the actors are doing on set into the scene. Now [our character animation] has exactly the same kind of vibe as the other stuff—there are no stylistic differences. Seamless." Now that sounds like a good reason to order a clap of thunders (that's a stiff drink in pirate talk!) for all involved.

Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest raids theaters nationwide on July 7.

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# Digital Magic

# **Deciphering the Notebook Market**



by Chris Grove

n a perfect world. Apple would dominate the notebook market at large (as much as its machines dominate the entertainment business in particular). But it's not and it won't. While Mac owners can rightfully claim that their machines are cooler (with the trifecta of ergonomics, the best multi-media apps available and true plug-and-play capability) their favorite company will never make up the ground it mistakenly conceded in the early 1980s when it refused to allow third-party manufacturers access to license the Mac OS.

Perhaps because they still have over 95% market share, most Windows notebook makers have competed over price as much as anything else in the past decade. Which is why, until now, if you looked in the office of just about any filmmaker, animator or other creative type, you'd find a Mac. But that is changing. Some PC makers are moving into the audience of the classic Mac buyer. Case in point: The new gamer notebook from Canadabased **Eurocom**. It's the company's first model powered by an Intel Core Duo processor and ATI Mobility Radeon X1800XT graphics (with 256 MB of DDR3 VRAM). The new Eurocom M570U Divine model features a 17-inch widescreen display (16:9 aspect ratio with WUXGA 1920by-1200 pixels resolution) and full-size desktop-like keyboard. It's designed specifically for high-performance professional computing, gaming, movies, digital photography and home video editing.

The Intel Core Duo processor technology is actually two processors (up to 2.26 GHz) engineered onto a single chip. Eurocom promises that the Divine will deliver higher performance in 2D and 3D graphics, video editing and music encoding than a single core CPU. Among other things, the Divine has a removable modular bay that can take an optical drive, a second hard drive or a second battery pack. It has 802.11a/b/g wireless network capability, Bluetooth 2.0, a gigabit Ethernet, a 4-in-1 portable media card reader, an integrated 1.3 megapixel webcam for video conferencing and a surround-sound system with SRS WOW technology.

If you think that sounds kind of like the configuration on the new Intel-powered MacBook Pro, you'd be right. And there's also a bit of an irony here. Apple has just announced the release of its lower-cost MacBook line (distinct from its premium-priced MacBook Pro line) powered by the same Intel chip that's in the Divine. And, with a little less technology (a less sophisticated graphics card, for example), the price for the black 13inch MacBook model is \$1,499. The Divine line starts at \$2,251. MacBook Pros, meanwhile, start at \$1,999. (For

the record and for further comparison, Dell's latest high-end gamer laptop, the XPS M1710, starts at \$2,600 for the basic model and rises to \$4,215 for the fully-loaded version. CNET calls it "the best system a lot of money can buy.") Now if only Mac had done pricing like this (even with its closed OS system) back in the day, they might be playing to the masses today and not have to settle for status as the

elite niche player in the personal and increasingly portable computer world.

#### **An Artistic Site**

DAZ Productions Inc., a developer of professional quality 3D models and software, has unveiled its own community web destination. ArtZone.com is a place for digital artists to, among other things, post, share and review each other's art. "The common thread in ArtZone is the passion for art," says Dan Farr, president of DAZ Productions. "(It has been) built around the desires of artists and art enthusiasts and offers a well-defined and highly accessible outlet to share creations, become inspired and interact with like-minded individuals."

Members can present their own virtual galleries, which are open to member comments. Through the use of groups, live chats and message boards, artists can also mingle with each other socially, professionally or in any way that encourages their appreciation for creativity and collaboration. ArtZone offers features including virtual galleries, spotlight images, multimedia links, searchable artist profiles, forums, events and more.

"What I like about ArtZone is that the people here are on the same level of thinking," says Donna de Leeuw, a professional designer living in the Netherlands. "They know what you're talking about as they share the same vibe creating and being creative, not only in 3D but every medium."

#### Rainy Day Effects

On the commercial front, less-is-more continues to mark the best commercials using visual effects, effects











that are, to a large extent, invisible. Tony Kaye's McDonald's spot Rainy Day is a good example. The only technology used in the spot was

used to make

The new MacBook release raindrops on a window Eurocom M570U Divine spell the letter "M." But the backbone of the commercial is the emotion of a little boy kept indoors from his playground by a drenching rain. Leaving aside the issue of manipulating children to want fast food as an antidote to sadness, the com-

mercial fulfills the rule of advertising ignored by most advertisers these days and their highly paid agencies. Namely, that an advertisement should make you feel something about the product and, ideally, something positive.

"The water on the window was critical to the narrative of the spot," says f/x artist Chris Markos of Chicagobased **SOL designfx**. F/x collaborator Chris Kreynos took the lead on Flame, adjusting drips and contrast, and controlling the speed of the raindrops, among other tasks. As the spot was actually shot in sunlight, work also had to be done on shots of the little boy to make the weather cooperate with the storyline. "Our ultimate goal was to have the audience fall into the emotion of the spot, with no real nod toward how the effect might have been accomplished." McLuhan (yes, him again), as full of aphorisms as Oscar Wilde, once observed that: All

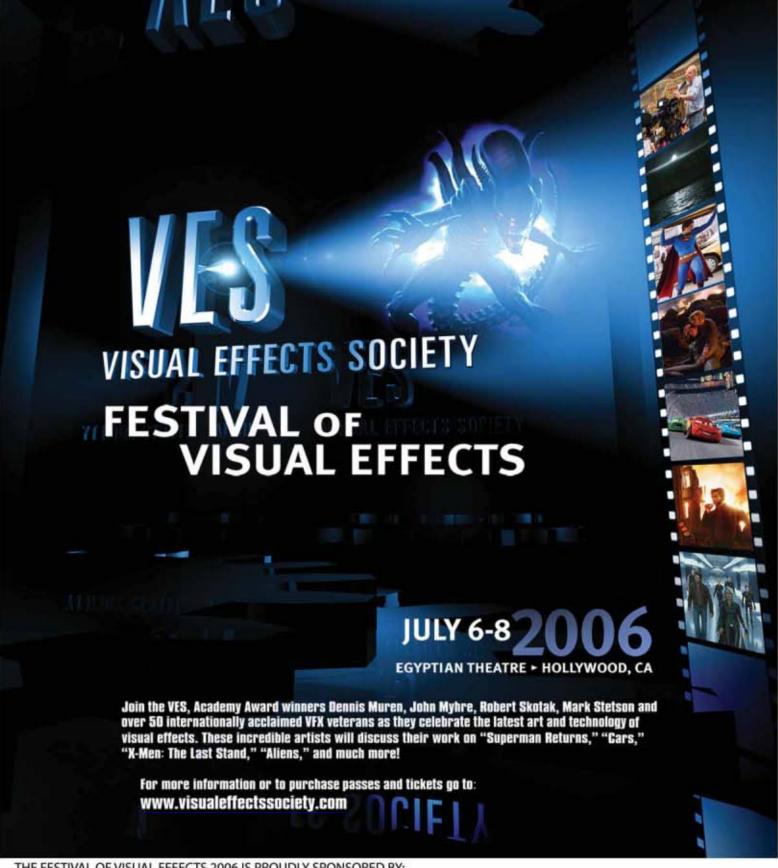
were not so. Chris Grove is a Los Angeles-based journalist and actor. If you have hot tips or story ideas for his future columns, e-mail him at edit@animationmagazine.net.

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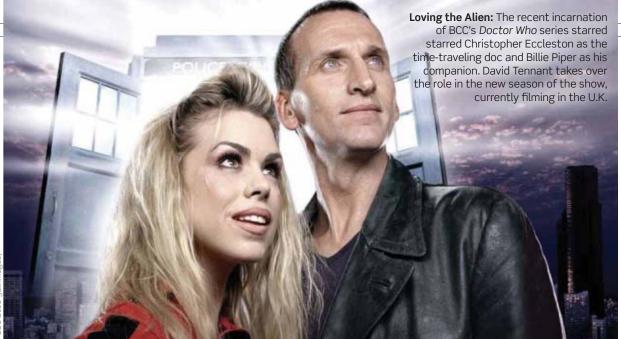












Cause & Effect

# This Doctor Is Still In!

The latest incarnation of the long-running Doctor Who series continues to push the vfx envelope on the BBC and Sci-Fi Channel. by Barbara Robertson

Ithough it has never reached the levels of mass appeal enjoyed by shows such as Lost in Space and Star Trek in the U.S., the long-running BBC sci-fi series Doctor Who has a phenomenal following all over the world. Created by Sydney Newman, the series first ran from 1963 until 1989 and held

the record as the longest-running science fiction television series in the world. Known for its creative low-budget special effects and inventive plots, the story of an eccentric time-traveling alien (or perhaps half-alien, as later discovered) continues to be a cult favorite. In fact, if you Google Doctor

Who, you'll get 188 million results, about 80 million more even than Star Wars.

In March of last year, Doctor Who regenerated into a new 13-episode BBC series, starring Christopher Eccleston as the latest version of the Doc. In the U.S., the show has drawn large number of viewers

to the Sci-Fi Channel's Friday night lineup.

This year, another 13-part season of 45-minute episodes began airing in April. As before, the good doctor travels through time and space in the Tardis, a creaky old time machine, battling injustice while running from own people, the Time Lords, but this time he encounters new and improved visual effects thanks to the

digital wizards at The Mill in London.

"When you look at some of those early shows, it was all model work," says David Houghton, visual effects supervisor. "They used early chromakey, but it was all live chromakey. They didn't have an opportunity to touch up the edges or color balance anything. I think it was very difficult in those days. We can refine shots in compositing and tidy up all the edges. They had to film stuff right in the first place."

Instead, the 21st century effects crew has to plan stuff right in the first place. Even though the tools and artistry have changed, time and budget constraints haven't. "As an exercise, Doctor Who is an exercise in containment," Houghton says. "Because of the time limit, we often have to knock stuff out quickly."

The Mill has dedicated one floor to Doctor Who and there are around 23 people who work on the series' effects. In addition to Houghton and Will Cohen, visual effects producer, the crew includes nine 3D artists and an equal number of compositors, a telecine opera-



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Linux-based PCs for 3D modeling, Mental Images' Mental Ray for rendering, and for compositing, Autodesk's Flame and Apple's Shake.

"We do a little R&D, but it's difficult under our time constraints," says Houghton. "We have around five to six weeks per episode to do the effects, and that's a short amount of time to create effects that will stand up to modern effects work. We rely on methods we've all learned in the process of doing previous work."

Even though time is short, because each episode is set in a different time and place, the effects vary widely. "It's not like Battlestar Galactica," Houghton says. "Our stuff is different every week." In one season, the effects might range from space ships and alien creatures to particle effects and explosions and nearly always include matte paintings to establish locations. "Doctor Who visits wonderful places. We want to give viewers a sense of wonder."

For example, The Mill's artists have painted a cave system beneath the surface of a planet, projected paintings of 1945 London onto geometry for an air raid during the Blitz, and exploded both the sun and the earth. And then, by contrast, the studio animated a child's drawing by painting each frame in PhotoShop for one episode. "It was a short shot, so one of our animators did it," says Houghton.

Much of the work in the second series has involved creatures. "In the first series, we had limited time to do the creatures, so they were relatively simple," Houghton says. Among the first season's creatures were CG versions of Slitheen for long shots; a bat-like Reaper that sucks on the time paradox; and Cassandra, who was a face in a flat, stretched piece of skin. "Those creatures were generally there as something visual, but they didn't interact with anything. Most of the time they were in the air."

In the second season, the CG characters interact with the actors. For example, a CG werewolf that chases creatures in a Victorian house stars in the second episode, "Tooth and Claw." Knowing this would be a complex effect, Houghton says that Russell Davies, executive producer and writer, created the episode in a way that would ensure that The Mill could accomplish the work within the deadline.

For the transformation from actor to wolf, the crew shot the affected actor against greenscreen and then replaced him with the 3D creature. "We had bits popping out of his face and then did a facial takeover from the actor to the wolf mainly in 3D," Houghton says. To create the wolf's fur, the team used Joe Alter's "Shave and a Haircut" plug-in for Maya. "It worked beautifully," says Houghton. For a simpler transformation in the episode "School Reunion," though, they turned schoolteachers into creatures via Maya particle effects.

Although the crew receives a synopsis of each episode early on, scripts arrive only around five weeks before shooting begins. When the script comes in, Houghton quickly determines what they can accomplish, storyboards the effects shots and clears the work with Davies and the director. On set, Houghton supervises shots that include effects. "We present the effects in the way we think they'll tell the story as it's written in the script and generally, that's how they go down," he says. "There's little room for change at the end of the day. We can do a few tweaks, but nowhere near as many as on a feature or commercial, so before we start, we nail down what we can do in the time we have. Once we've broken down the work, the guys go off and do their scenes without interference."

The effects are nearly always digital; the crew rarely uses models—not even to blow up buildings. They usually don't have time.

"It's often better to blow up a large scale model than do it in 2D and 3D, but the thing with *Doctor Who* is that they have a limited amount of resources and the shooting schedule is tight," Houghton says. "We often don't have time to set up a model shoot or the resources have been put elsewhere. But if we can, we will." When they can't, they film the building and then composite in a 2D explosion that contains 3D debris.

Despite the limitations—or perhaps because of them-Houghton seems to relish the work, which calls for the effects crew to be as inventive as the scriptwriters. "This is unlike any other job," he says. "Big features can get tedious when you're pixel moving for the umpteenth time. We just can't do that. This is quick. From one week to the next, you're bidding something different. It's quite a lot of fun." ■

Doctor Who airs on the Sci-Fi Channel Fridays at 9 p.m. The complete first season DVD set of the new series is available this month on BBC Video.

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Golden Critter: Cal Art student Chris Choy senior thesis film, The Possum, was the recipient of the Academy's Gold Medal for student films last month. The 5 ½-minute-long hand-drawn short required close to 2,000 pencil drawings and was inspired by Choy's Korean-born dad's encounter with a thieving possum



# **Oscar Smiles on Three Student Animators**

by Ellen Wolff

he Student Academy Awards were handed out for the 33rd time on June 10 at the Academy's Samuel Goldwyn Theater in Beverly Hills, Calif. Earning this honor can be a harbinger of future filmmaking success, as it has been for past winners like John Lasseter, Bob Zemeckis, Spike Lee and Trey Parker. Last year's Gold Medal recipient, Shane Acker, is already turning his winning short g into a computeranimated feature, produced by Tim Burton.

This year, CG animation was strongly represented once again by two of the three prize winners, and both shorts showed a growing mastery of the medium by college animators. Thomas Leavitt from Brigham Young University garnered the Bronze Medal (and \$2,000) for Turtles, a comic short that includes realistically animated CG water. Meng Vue from Ringling School of Art and Design won the Silver Medal (and \$3,000) for The Dancing

Thief, which demonstrated that a classic toon tale could thrive in CGI.

But notably, the Gold Medal (and \$5,000) went to a hand-drawn film, The Possum, a five-and-a-half-minute senior thesis film that required CalArts student Chris Choy to complete around 2,000 pencil drawings. Computers did play a key role, however. Choy scanned his drawings and then used Adobe Photoshop and After Effects to color and render the film. "It took one year," says Choy of the painstaking project, which he created completely alone. But he says with a laugh, "In CalArts' Character Animation program there is no other life besides doing animation!"

Even the story inspiration for The Possum was personal. The film follows the efforts of a very determined farmer as he tries to prevent a possum from stealing his apple harvest. At one point the farmer whacks the possum on the head with a shovel-and in true comic fashion the resilient critter returns wearing an eye patch. Choy, who is Korean American, explains, "In Korea there are no pos-Chris Choy sums, so when my father saw one, he thought it was a big rat. He was so scared he hit it on the head.

That's where I got the idea."

The story developed as Choy listened to Mozart, and he used Mozart's music to tell his tale without a word of dialogue. The music added a poignancy that played well against the film's visual antics.

That The Possum won the Gold Medal probably came as no surprise to the Cal-Arts faculty, since two of Choy's earlier films had been finalists for Student Academy Awards. His family, however, might be a bit surprised because, Choy confesses, "I've been too embarrassed to show this film to them!"

Choy is now employed as a storyboard and layout artist at Portland-based Laika Entertainment (formerly Vinton Studios.) "I'm working on Jack and Ben's Animated Adventure, which is the studio's second

continued on page 52

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> - Troy Morgan, director, DRAGON, Grand Jury Award Best Animated Short, Slamdance 2006



fox21.







#### **Opportunities**

continued from page 50 feature. It's been exciting."

Like Choy, Silver Medalist Meng Vue also landed a job right out of college. He's currently employed as an animator at Electronic Arts near San Francisco. His two-and-a-half-minute award-winner, The Dancing Thief was his senior thesis at Ringling, and he proudly admits, "It was inspired by Looney Tunes."

The Dancing Thief unveils the exploits of a jewel thief who finds himself caught in a tango with an XXXL female security guard. The characters dance with a balletlike grace that's both beautiful and hilariously preposterous. "It was purely keyframed," says Vue. "I looked at Dirty Dancing and tango movies to get a sense of the dancing that I wanted to incorporate in the piece. And I got some Bugs Bunny cartoons for reference, too!"

Vue used Autodesk's Maya for modeling, animation and rendering, Adobe Photoshop for texturing and Apple's Shake for compositing. The most daunting part of the production was actually finding the right tango music to suit his characters. "I had to go through entire libraries of music online until I found something." The production itself, which spanned August to April of Vue's senior year was, he recalls, "Pretty much a solo operation. It was basically 8 a.m. to midnight every day."

All of which was good training for the high-pressure business of video game animation in which he's currently employed. Vue admits to wanting to be a director eventually, "But right now I'm testing the waters." One thing that's certain, however,

is that the \$3,000 cash award from the Academy will provide a welcome assist "towards paying off my college loans!"

College isn't completely out of the rear view mirror yet for Thomas Leavitt, director of the Bronze Medal-winning Turtles. This comic short was produced largely during Leavitt's sophomore and junior years at Brigham Young University and took a year and a half to complete. Leavitt dethe facial animation.

Leavitt did most of the animation, but notes, "For the texturing and rendering I had tons of help. We labored for hours to create realistic-looking water that would fit the cartoony feel of the environment but would also interact be-Meng Vue lievably with the characters. The turtles dive their heads into the

water and we had to worry about the collisions. A lot of it is faked! Originally we were going to have the turtles sitting in a river with cascading water. But then it became a pond because that was easier."

Leavitt's team used Autodesk's Maya for animation, Apple's Shake for compositing and Pixar's RenderMan for rendering. "We really had top-of-the-line software at our fingertips," says Leavitt. He explains that when BYU teacher R. Brent Adams started the CG program, he approached Pixar president Ed Catmull, who donated RenderMan licenses to the school. As a



a pond, and two have good luck. It's a lesson on Thomas Leavitt greed and being happy

with what you have." The film represents a first for BYU's fiveyear-old computer animation program—it

was the first film to be animated to a dialogue track. "We didn't have a lot of funding at first," recalls Leavitt, "so the voices were improvised by friends who'd had some experience with comedy sports performing." The result was simulated turtlespeak, but it was lively enough to drive

result, Turtles benefited from the capabilities of RenderMan 12.5. "We had occlusion, which made a big difference."

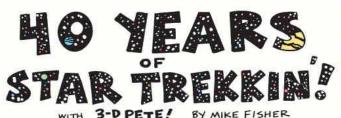
Even prize-winning projects have things their creators would fix, and for Leavitt that's the water sound effects. "I recorded them in my apartment bathtub with that nasty bathroom echo. There's actually tons of stuff I would have fixed. Had the University known Turtles would have gone this far I'm sure they would have upped things a notch! "■

Ellen Wolff is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects, animation and education.

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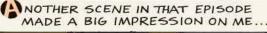


YEP, I REMEMBER WHEN I FIRST DISCOVERED STAR TREK! I WAS ABOUT 10 YEARS OLD AND MY FAMILY WAS LIVING AT ALAMOGORDO AIR FORCE BASE IN NEW MEXICO.



ONESTLY, I THINK THE
BIGGEST EMOTIONAL SHOCK OF
MY LITTLE 10-YEAR-OLD LIFE
CAME DURING THE MENAGERIE. THEY CHOKE: ME ... YOU MEAN







WOW. SOME-THING ABOUT THE WAY THAT ORION SLAVE GIRL IS DANCING, MAKES MY BODY FEEL ALL TINGLY AND





MR. SPOCK SEEMED SO INTERESTING, 50 WISE, 50 SAD! ...



GOSH, WHEN HE WAS A LITTLE BOY, SPOCK DIDN'T HAVE ANY

THE STORIES WERE SO BRILLIANT! I REMEMBER FEELING LIKE HOT STUFF
BECAUSE I UNDERSTOOD THE PLOT OF
THE CITY ON THE
EDGE OF FOREVER
PERFECTLY!



HEN I WATCHED
METAMORPHOSIS
I REMEMBER THAT
MY MOM WAS IN MY MOM WAS IN THE NEXT ROOM, IRONING AND LISTENING!

OH. I SEE! PETE THAT CLOUD IS IN LOVE WITH THAT ZEFREM COCHRANE



PLEASE! Y KNOW NOTHING ABOUT SCIENCE FICTION! GEEZ!



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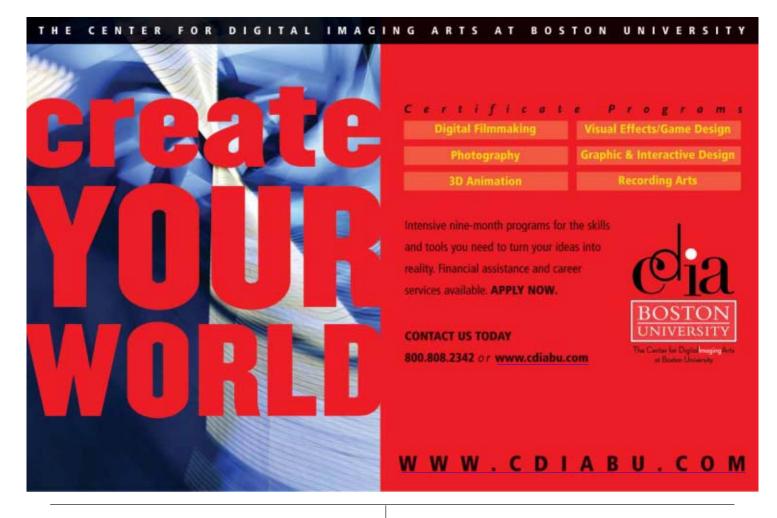
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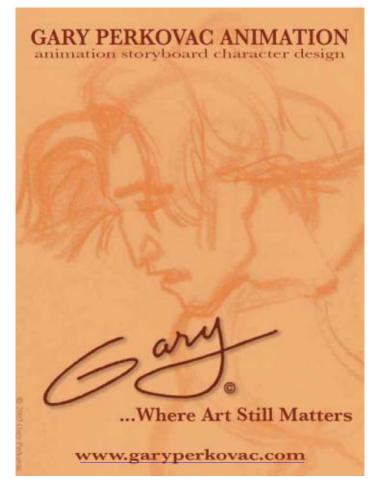






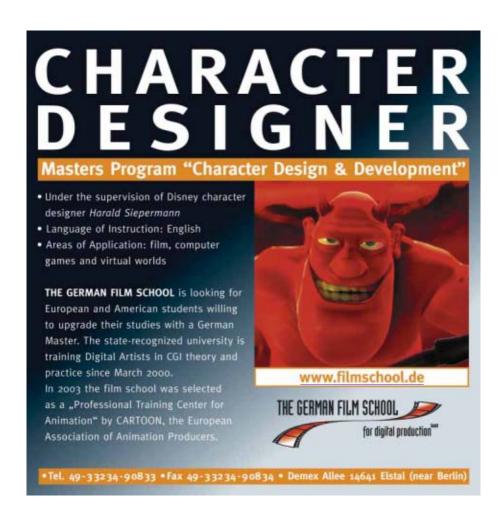
















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t's another wacky and inspiring day at Warner Bros. Animation studios in Sherman Oaks, Calif., where the talented staff of the new fall series Legion of Super Heroes plot their global takeover. The much-anticipated show airs this fall on Kids' WB! Saturdays at 11 a.m.



Suddenly, Brainiac 5 isn't so popular at the coffee station. (Robert Haverland, Tim Maltby)



Story editor Rob Hoegee explains to classically trained Bouncing Boy exactly what his motivation is for the next line.



Producer Linda Steiner and associate producer AJ Vargas arrive at Legion Headquarters to start the day.



have anything to say. We just thought you should see it.



Intern Leah Santos save the secret last page of our season finale from accidental destruction! Great job, Leah! Now please failed miserably doesn't mean our artists finish alphabetizing our comic books. can't strike a pose occasionally! (Stand



Production manager Marlene Fenton knows how to get the artists inspired...food!



Our coordinators always offer just the right amount of constructive criticism to the artists. DRAMATIZATION: No artists were hurt very much in the making of this picture. (Standing: Steve Kindernay, Andrew Garda; seated: Derrick Wyatt)



Just because their boy band "N'ink"

ing, left to right: Andy Chiang, Glen Won, Richard Kim; Squatting: Norm Ryang)

director Lauren Montgomery, but he did learr he can drink his weight in liquid chocolate.



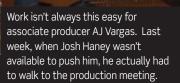
War isn't pretty—especially when it's fought by grown men with dolls. (Derrick Wyatt, Art Lee)

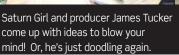


After drawing one too many pictures, artist Jay Baker has an identity crisis and takes a leap of faith.



But thankfully he didn't break his drawing hand!





After a hard day of drawing storyboards, Irineo Maramba hits the sack...uh...desk?

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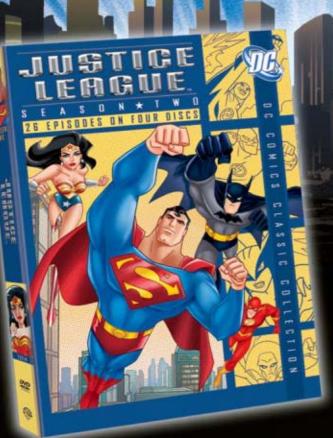
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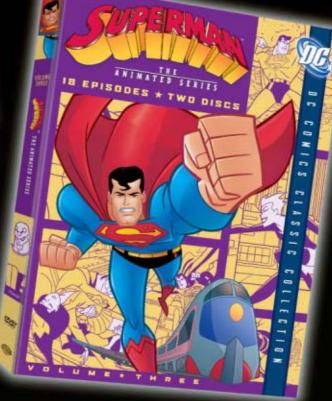


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